TU WIEN Informatics

Wie helfen Transparenzframeworks in der Durchführung von Transparenzanfragen basierend auf Transparenzgesetzen?

DIPLOMARBEIT

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades

Diplom-Ingenieur

im Rahmen des Studiums

Wirtschaftsinformatik

eingereicht von

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How do data frameworks assist in applying transparency laws?

DIPLOMA THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Diplom-Ingenieur

in

Business Informatics

by

Andreas Czák, BSc
Registration Number 0225535

to the Faculty of Informatics

at the TU Wien

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Declaration of Authorship

Andreas Czák, BSc

I hereby declare that I have written this Master's Thesis independently, that I have completely specified the utilized sources and resources and that I have definitely marked all parts of the work - including tables, maps and figures - which belong to other works or to the internet, literally or extracted, by referencing the source as borrowed.

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Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis was hard, especially during a pandemic, not being able to meet people in person, not being able to stick together with friends in learning groups and motivating each other. It was a hard task, but you are reading this now, which means I have made it.

I would like to thank Thomas Gauss, who, during my time at the TU Vienna, motivated me every time I lost hope. I might have quit university years ago if he had not helped me to fight the regular student life struggles. He was not only a good studying companion providing helpful feedback but also was a good friend when I needed him. Also, he helped with proofreading, which I am very thankful for.

I also very dearly want to thank my partner Naëmi Handler who supported me with all her heart. She believed in me and always said: "You can do it".

Big thanks as well to my friends on Twitter, who helped me to fix the many issues I had with LaTeX, like missing letters and unknown errors that I could not figure out how to fix. It would have taken me days to resolve these errors that you were able to remove in minutes. Namely, I want to mention Marei (@TeXhackse@chaos.social), Michael Preisach and Lukas Daniel Klausner. Thanks a lot!

Big shout-out to all professors and assistants of TU Wien and the University of Vienna, thank you for the really interesting and encouraging classes that I was able to attend. Also, thank you Mag. Dr. iur. Markus Haslinger for being my advisor, keeping me motivated during the pandemics in our online sessions and doing the final check of this thesis.

Many thanks as well to my interview partners, and everyone that helped me to collect information on my topic: people who sent me books, and people who provided me with voice recognition services free of charge, which made transcribing much easier for me.

And finally, special thanks to myself; none of this would have been written if it wasn't for my hard work, and I really should be thankful to myself for doing this.

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Kurzfassung

In dieser Arbeit stellen wir die Frage, wie ein ideales Transparenzgesetz und ein ideales IT-Framework für Informationsfreiheitsanträge aussehen können. Wir überprüfen relevante Forschungsarbeiten, führen Experteninterviews durch und stützen uns auf die Ergebnisse des weltweit einzigen internationalen Projekts zur Überprüfung von Transparenz, Right to Information Rating (RTI-rating.org). Wir entwickeln unsere eigenen Indikatoren zur Bewertung von Transparenzgesetzen und verwenden sie, um das österreichische Gesetz zu bewerten und herauszufinden, welche Merkmale ihm fehlen, um ein führendes Transparenzgesetz zu sein. Wir untersuchen, wie Experten IT-Frameworks für Informationsfreiheitsanfragen einschätzen und zeigen, dass die meisten unserer interviewten Expertinnen und Experten das FROIDE-Framework als das am besten geeignete für Österreich und Deutschland ansehen.

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Abstract

In this paper, we pose the question what an ideal transparency law and an ideal IT framework for freedom of information requests look like. We review relevant research papers, conduct expert interviews and build upon the findings of the only international project to review transparency around the world called Right to Information Rating (RTI-rating.org). We develop our own indicators to assess transparency laws and use them to evaluate the Austrian law and find which features it is lacking. We explore how experts view IT frameworks for making freedom of information requests and find out that most experts consider the FROIDE framework as the most appropriate for Austria and Germany.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation and Problem Statement

Austria currently does not have a law for information transparency (Informationsfreiheitsgesetz) and the Austrian Duty to Grant Information Act (Auskunftspflichtgesetz) is, based on the results of the "Right to Information" Rating, insufficient. The latter rated 128 countries in 2019 based on various aspects of freedom of information listing Austria on the last place (ex aequo with Palau). Austria has been on the last place since the start of the report in 2011[302].

Austria is one of the last countries to have a so-called official secret (Amtsgeheimnis) protected by a law of constitutional rank. This secrecy is only weakened by high court decisions, for example, by the ECHR, which made it easier for journalists and so-called "public watchdogs" to gain information free of charge from Austrian ministries (PDF p. 9)[80]. Nonetheless, periods for providing information are long (up to 8 weeks). Depending on who is asking for information, whether it is a journalist or an ordinary citizen, the ministries may charge for answering the questions. Additionally, there are no consequences if administration offices give false, insufficient or no answers at all.

The coalition pact of the current government (ÖVP, Greens - that started their work on January 7th 2020, and remains in charge at the point of writing this paper) foresees to change the current legal status from a constitutionally set official secrecy to a new transparency law (p. 17)[196].

As shown in the example of the public contracts law in the Slovak Republic (p. 4)[328], a strict transparency regime can have a massive impact on state tenders, reduce corruption, increase competition and ultimately reduce procurement costs.

This paper aims to provide a scientific basis for the selection of IT-based frameworks that support state transparency.

There are two ways of providing transparency. One requires active participation - the request for information, for example, by using freedom of information laws and asking questions, and the other is rather passive, searching for available information provided via open government portals. Our work focuses on portals that facilitate the publication of information that was previously not automatically available.

Austria currently has a couple of websites providing transparency. Concerning **open government data**, there are at least two websites. One of them, data.gv.at[52], is open source and based on CKAN with modifications available on GitHub. The other, transparenzportal.gv.at[366], is not open source. The government claims that their security concept does not allow to give away any information about source code or audits of the software[15].

Fragdenstaat.at is an open-source portal informing about the freedom of information. It is provided by Forum Informationsfreiheit, an NGO running the campaign for a Freedom of Information Act in Austria. It is based on the german fragdenstaat.de project FROIDE. The source code of both projects can be found on GitHub[127][126].

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1.2 Research Questions

- Which attributes does a class- leading data framework for transparency have? (Based on expert opinion)
- Which properties does a class- leading transparency law consist of? (Based on the ranking of rti-rating.org)
- Which attributes and properties are missing in the current Austrian transparency law and its implementation?
- Which data framework would experts in Austria (and the EU) rate highest for providing state transparency?

To answer the research questions, it is necessary to get an overview of international transparency laws. For this, the use of the Global Right to Information Rating is helpful. It ranks countries based on 61 indicators, each corresponding to a particular feature of a good RTI (right to information) regime. For each indicator, countries earn points within a predefined range of scores (in most cases 0-2); the maximum number of points that can be reached is 150 points. The indicators are divided into seven distinct categories, namely: Right of Access, Scope, Requesting Procedures, Exceptions & Refusals, Appeals, Sanctions & Protections and Promotional Measures[300].

The literature research is based on all relevant articles available in the online library of the TU and qualitative expert interviews. The underlying methods are described in chapter 1.4 on page 4.

1.3 Expected Results

We conduct expert interviews and provide comparison charts showing the properties of data frameworks. Additionally, we classify aspects of transparency laws and relate the ratings of rti-rating.org to expert opinions. We also provide an overview of important aspects of government transparency which are currently missing in Austria. Moreover, we provide several experts opinions on the highest rated transparency framework and the possibility of using it in Austria.

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1.4 Methodological Approach

The following paragraph provides a concise summary of the methodological approach:

1.5 Literature Research

1.5.1 Structured Literature Research

To gain basic knowledge and provide it to the readers of this thesis, we orientated ourselves on systematic literature research. As Kitchenham and Charters[179] mentioned (p. 11):

> „**Systematic Literature Reviews**
>
> A systematic literature review (often referred to as a systematic review) is a means of identifying, evaluating and interpreting all available research relevant to a particular research question, topic area, or phenomenon of interest. Individual studies contributing to a systematic review are called primary studies; a systematic review is a form of secondary study.“

Our reason for doing this was

> „To identify any gaps in current research in order to suggest areas for further investigation.“

. The quote is consistent with one of the reasons named by Kitchenham and Charters on page 11.

As Stefan Schulte pointed out in his lecture about Systematic Literature Reviews in 194.078 Research Methods (SE 2,0) 2020W a full systematic literature review requires **„considerable more effort than traditional literature reviews“** and **„are usually done in teams“**. That is why we developed a simplified version in order not to over-expand the amount of work for this master's thesis. We adapted the Structured Literature Research and used a **Simplified Structured Literature Research** as follows:

1.5.2 Simplified Structured Literature Research

Search Strategy and Documentation

We used Citavi 6[342] as provided by the TU Wien Student Software Services[370] as literature management software, which would help us to reduce the amount of manual documentation during our search efforts. We connected it to the library system of the

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TU Vienna and searched for certain **keywords**, namely **"government transparency"**, **"state transparency"**, **"transparency framework"** and **"Transparenz"**. Then we retrieved all the results for the keyword and further structured them into categories. The keyword formed the top level in each case, then there were the subcategories "suitable", "unsuitable" and "offline book". Finally, we examined the sub-category "suitable" and further divided it into the sub-categories "relevant", "irrelevant" and "double".

- suitable
  - relevant
  - irrelevant
  - double
- unsuitable
- *offline book*

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The distinction between suitable and unsuitable was made by reading the abstract; if it was completely clear from reading the abstract that the work had nothing to do with the topic of the master's thesis, it was declared unsuitable.

Offline books are not accessible via TU VPN and were therefore mostly disposed of unread, as this work was written during a pandemic and thus physical access to the library was not possible or advisable for health reasons. Some books that seemed very suitable for the topic were shared by the authors and categorised accordingly. The remaining books could be further analysed by another thesis once all access restrictions are lifted, and no health concerns remain. Judging by all the available data from these books, we do not believe that they will help to make a current contribution to this topic, as this topic is too short-lived and, from a purely legal point of view, papers before December 2017 have clearly lost relevance (see Chapter 1.7 on page 8).

With every new keyword, the literature collection was expanding. By using the built-in function to ignore duplicates - which we did in the category "transparency framework" - the expansion of the literature collection had slowed noticeably. Unfortunately, we did not use this duplicate exclusion strategy from the beginning, so we documented it. Since we had to read all the suitable papers, we did mark all the papers that we had already read before. Therefore, we made a subcategory called "double".

Due to the fact that we already had indexed some papers for the search term "Transparenz" in an unstructured way, we deactivated the "ignore duplicates" function for this search term in order to get those results structured in a good way as well. We sorted out duplicates manually.

The subcategories of category suitable:

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Relevant papers are those that we consider dedicated to the research topic and that add value in the sense of additional knowledge. **Irrelevant** papers mention parts of the research topic but only touch on it marginally or are outdated due to new developments. **Double** papers are those that we have already read and marked as relevant or irrelevant in another category.

1.5.3 Documentation of the Structured Literature research

The keywords for literature research were:

- 1.1 "state transparency"
  - 1.1.1 suitable (8)
    - relevant (5) [25, 44, 200, 243, 345]
    - irrelevant (3) [54, 63, 184]
    - double (0)
  - 1.1.2 unsuitable (60) [28, 12, 37, 81, 161, 178, 190, 201, 267, 271, 279, 380, 21, 208, 373, 129, 401, 404, 317, 245, 344, 375, 346, 46, 232, 389, 163, 85, 284, 103, 177, 305, 381, 353, 319, 297, 241, 323, 120, 18, 99, 406, 347, 324, 229, 101, 326, 392, 100, 70, 369, 277, 295, 17, 123, 354, 132, 69, 121, 45]
  - 1.1.3 offline book (11) [272, 106, 29, 234, 275, 226, 119, 181, 348, 59, 394]
- 1.2 "government transparency"
  - 1.2.1 suitable (14)
    - relevant (10)[320, 98, 156, 159, 185, 183, 184, 27, 351, 351]
    - irrelevant (2)
    - double (2)
  - 1.2.2 unsuitable (17) [182, 195, 240, 401, 336, 26, 395, 323, 1, 327, 367, 258, 331, 58, 333, 138, 239]
  - 1.2.3 offline book (28) [206, 220, 13, 349, 307, 29, 268, 234, 14, 387, 226, 62, 207, 60, 116, 16, 181, 56, 39, 82, 135, 38, 269, 340, 394, 332, 199, 4]
- 1.3 "transparency framework" (excluding duplicates)
  - 1.3.1 suitable (0) - only duplicates
  - 1.2.2 unsuitable (0) - only duplicates
  - 1.3.3 offline book (3) [152, 134, 227]
- 1.4 "Transparenz"
  - 1.4.1 suitable (10)
    - relevant (2) [47, 97]

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    * irrelevant (3) [162, 260, 274]
    * double (5) [44, 330, 320, 156, 185]
  - 1.4.2 unsuitable (165) [12, 37, 81, 193, 213, 237, 236, 244, 259, 262, 263, 271, 312, 380, 382, 400, 136, 218, 150, 363, 168, 383, 228, 117, 311, 316, 83, 20, 364, 362, 42, 396, 350, 205, 225, 77, 24, 160, 175, 265, 388, 192, 21, 318, 361, 139, 230, 171, 216, 343, 102, 141, 376, 109, 231, 194, 180, 105, 249, 403, 107, 137, 129, 34, 188, 368, 337, 149, 266, 294, 306, 35, 334, 211, 355, 8, 155, 212, 404, 221, 360, 222, 233, 164, 317, 5, 255, 339, 191, 329, 253, 53, 393, 322, 245, 344, 167, 148, 352, 7, 397, 325, 147, 186, 22, 313, 151, 158, 75, 385, 365, 209, 257, 299, 264, 198, 215, 261, 142, 187, 372, 49, 356, 217, 146, 55, 341, 163, 242, 223, 172, 309, 85, 284, 133, 76, 144, 398, 30, 270, 210, 84, 286, 386, 256, 273, 315, 118, 252, 79, 74, 50, 381, 57, 66, 224, 174, 276, 145, 310, 384, 153, 40, 176, 78]
  - 1.4.3 offline book (34) [204, 170, 314, 157, 122, 48, 203, 390, 124, 358, 251, 13, 349, 202, 407, 214, 173, 338, 307, 308, 285, 282, 33, 298, 335, 378, 405, 43, 143, 166, 104, 278, 377, 165]

1.5.4 Unstructured Literature Research

Before choosing this structured approach, we used an unstructured approach to find papers and websites containing information relevant to our research question. Also after using a structured approach to find papers in the TU Wien Library system, it soon emerged that we were not able to find all the information relevant to our topic there. So, we searched the web and asked experts and listed these sources and papers in an unstructured way and classified them according to the following categories:

- 2.1 "NGOs" [110, 113, 9, 374, 3, 131, 112, 238, 247, 359]
- 2.2 "jurisdiction and legislation"
    * 2.2.1 Austrian legislation [288, 281, 254, 292, 290, 293, 287, 291, 289]
    * 2.2.2 Austrian parties [196]
    * 2.2.3 EU legislation [90, 92, 93, 94, 91, 95]
    * 2.2.4 Austrian courts [379]
    * 2.2.5 European courts [80, 250, 89]
- 2.3 "articles and papers"
    * 2.3.1 "Austria" [31, 321, 296, 357, 86, 15, 399, 111, 73, 36]
    * 2.3.2 "Germany" [219, 235, 280, 140, 154]
    * 2.3.3 "EU" [402, 328, 87, 88]
    * 2.3.4 "International" [32, 41, 64, 65, 72, 189, 371, 197]
- 2.4 "Transparency Platforms"

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    * 2.4.1 "Austria" [19, 114, 6, 366, 52, 51]
    * 2.4.2 "EU" [11, 10, 68, 115, 248, 96, 283, 23, 391]
    * 2.4.3 "International" [67, 130, 246, 2, 108, 300, 304, 302]
  - 2.5 "Transparency Frameworks on GitHub"[61, 125, 126, 127]
  - 3.0 "Further resources needed for writing this thesis" [179, 128, 370, 342, 71]

1.6 In-depth results of the structured search

Since the distinction of the papers into relevant and irrelevant was done by conducting a quick analysis based on the title and the abstract of the paper, we continued the classification into relevant and irrelevant papers based on their content. Since the number of papers and their content is so great, we put the analysis into chapter 2 on page 15.

1.7 Legal findings of the unstructured search

Transparency frameworks work on the basis of laws and court decisions that make such services possible in the first place. In Austria, the most relevant law used to make transparency requests to public authorities is the Duty to Grant Information Act - in German "Auskunftspflichtgesetz" from 1987 with the last changes in 1998.[292, 288]

In 2005 Austria signed the Aarhus Convention, which provides for the right for everyone to receive environmental information that is held by public authorities ("access to environmental information"), the right to participate in environmental decision-making ("public participation in environmental decision-making") and the right to review procedures to challenge public decisions that have been made without respecting the two aforementioned rights or environmental law in general ("access to justice").[287, 90] These rights only apply to environmental information and do not apply in general. The Austrian law specifying these rights is called Umweltinformationsgesetz[293]. It took the ECJ ruling of 20 December 2017, C-664/15 [89] to significantly improve the rights of environmental organisations to exercise their rights based on the Aarhus Convention and, for example, participate in environmental procedures. Austrian laws have also been adapted based on this decision (e.g. Aarhus-BeteiligungsG 2018, BGBl I Nr 73/2018).

Transparency in public procurement in Austria is established by the Federal Procurement Act[289], which is based on EU directives (Directives 2014/23/EU[92], 2014/24/EU[93] and 2014/25/EU[94]) and is intended to ensure the non-discriminatory and transparent award of public contracts. Based on the Austrian law and the EU directive there exists an Austrian and an EU platform for public contracts: ted.europa.gv[96] and gv.vergabeportal.at[19].

In the course of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU as a steering and financing instrument for European agriculture, the transparency database transparenzdatenbank.at[6] was established in Austria. It is based on 2 EU regulations: Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013[91] and Regulation (EU) No 908/2014[95].

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1.8 Expert Interviews

We conducted one preliminary expert interview and ten guided expert interviews.

1.8.1 Preliminary Interview

During the research phase, we conducted an interview with an expert in the field of government transparency. We interviewed Mathias Huter from Forum Informationsfreiheit, which is the leading organisation in Austria demanding more state transparency[112]. This preliminary interview was a non-standardised, individual and open interview. According to Glaser[128] open interviews work with predefined topics but not with an interview guideline. This interview facilitated further literature research: it increased our general knowledge about the topic, and helped find other researchers in order to conduct guided expert interviews as described by Jochen Gläser and Grit Laudel[128].

1.8.2 Expert Interview and qualitative content analysis

This is one of the main parts of this master's thesis. We followed the procedure below and then explained the basic theoretic knowledge.

Procedure

- Formulate guiding questions for conducting the expert interviews
- Choose interview partners (also have a backup reserve of interview partners)
- Contact interview partners (including asking for the consent to record the interview)
- Prepare and test recording setup
- Conduct and record the expert interview
- Transcribe the interview
- Provide the transcribed interview to the interview partner in order to correct errors or mistakes
- Analyse the results using qualitative content analysis in order to answer the research questions

The interview guideline

After conducting our preliminary interview, we developed the following interview questions for our guided interview based on the knowledge gained. The main objective was to further deepen our knowledge on this topic.

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We partly clarified the questions in order to make them more understandable and to help the respondents stay on topic.

- **Organisational Questions**
  - Am I allowed to record this interview (I will have to repeat the question once I start recording)?
  - After pressing record: Once again, am I allowed to record this interview, I will make a transcript and use the content for my master's thesis?
  - Is it okay to name you and your organisation? If not, I will anonymize your name and/or organisation.
- **About the interviewee + background**
  - What is the name of your employer? In which countries do you work, which also includes which countries are affected by your work (e.g. working in Germany, but also on EU Level)?
  - Can you name the general tasks of the organisation you are working for?
- **Transparency**
  - Is government and state transparency something you come in touch in your daily (or monthly) work? If yes, please describe how?
  - Have you worked with laws on regional level, country level or EU level, that enable you to access information held by public authorities (right to information)?
  - If yes, please specify on which level (e.g. regional (please name the region), country (please name the country), international (e.g. EU level))
  - What are your experiences with RTI (right to information) laws?
  - What are key aspects that you believe have to be a part of a RTI law?
  - Which of these aspects are currently missing to you (and on which legislative level)?
- **Austrian Transparency Laws**
  - If not mentioned before:
    Have you worked with the Austrian so-called "Auskunftspflichtgesetz"
  - What positive, neutral and negative experiences did you make?
- **Frameworks**
  - Which frameworks for RTI requests or transparency research do you use?

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  - Do these frameworks play a role for you when doing data research or conducting RTI requests?
  - Can you name all the frameworks you know?
  - What are the positive aspects of these frameworks? Which features do you like?
  - What are the negative aspects of these frameworks? Which features are missing?
  - Could you decide for one specific framework that should be the standard framework for you on a country level? If yes, which one?

- **RTI Rating**
  - Do you know https://www.rti-rating.org/ ?
  - If yes, could you rate your overall impression of the information provided there? Please feel free to name the positive and negative aspects of this website and the information provided.

- **End Remarks**
  - Do you have any additional remarks you would like to make?

Once the interviews have been recorded, transcribed and corrected, we will use them to make a qualitative content analysis.

What is qualitative content analysis?

In qualitative content analysis[128] we treat the texts that we want to evaluate as base material containing our desired data. We place a search grid to extract data needed to answer our research question. Then we prepare these data and evaluate them.

The resulting aggregated information should help us answer our research questions.

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1.9 State-of-the-Art Literature on Transparency

Hamburg Transparency Law

Hamburg was the first federal state of Germany, which implemented not only a freedom of information act (2012) but transformed it into a transparency law (HubTG) that includes the obligation to disclose information proactively. It was introduced after a 2018 referendum and evaluated in 2018 using Standards of the German and Austrian Evaluation Association DeGeval 2016.

> „ The evaluation findings showed that the introduction of a transparency law can lead to advantages as well as disadvantages in various stakeholder groups. In general, however, the evaluation team concluded that the advantages which have accompanied the introduction of the law outweigh the disadvantages.“

[235]

Transparency Law of the Slovak Republic

The Slovak Republic is an example of how transparency laws and technical frameworks can lead to measurable improvements. The introduction and amendment of the Transparency Act resulted in more citizens gaining access to public documents and participating more in public procurement tenders.[328]

IRIS 2017

The 17th International Legal Informatics Symposium was held under the motto ”Transparency”. Although it is not easily accessible (there is no pdf version in the TU library), we managed to get hold of the conference documents and found multiple articles suitable. This is the original citation for which we provide a translation just below.

Magisches Vieleck der Transparenz [320]

> „Es gibt ein magisches Vieleck der Transparenz, das bei der Gestaltung von IT-Systemen in Recht und Staat beachtet werden muss:
>
> - Privatsphäre und Datenschutz: Das informationelle Selbstbestimmungsrecht sowie das „digitale Hausrecht“ müssen beachtet werden.
> - Profiling-Bedürfnisse des Staates (Verdächtige) zwecks Verbrechensbekämpfung und Gefahrenabwehr, aber auch personalisierter Dienstleistungen im E-Government bzw. der Wirtschaft (Konsumenten) zwecks personalisierter Dienstleistungen
> - Open Government: Der Staat soll zunehmend „gläsern“ werden und sein Wissen mit allen teilen.

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- Gläserne Wirtschaft: Die Wirtschaft möchte aber keine wesentliche Ausweitung der Publikationserfordernisse, um die Geschäftsgeheimnisse möglichst zu bewahren.
- Gläserner Mensch: Open Government und personalisierte Dienstleistungen der Wirtschaft und des Staates sollen aber nicht dazu führen, dass alle Informationen über den Bürger verfügbar sind.
- Die IT-Systeme sollen die Funktionen entsprechend der rechtlichen Vorgaben genau erfüllen; ansonsten aber möglichst wenig sichtbar sein (Transparenz im Sinne der Informatik). Trotzdem muss diese Transparenz auch transparent sein.

“

Magical polygon of transparency (our translation)

„There is a magical polygon of transparency that has to be taken into account by the law and the state when IT systems are being designed:

- Privacy and data protection: The right to informational self-determination as well as the ”digital domestic authority” has to be respected.
- Profiling desires of the state (suspects) for the purpose of combating crime and averting danger, but also personalised services in e-government and the economy (consumers) for the purpose of personalised services.
- Open government: The state should become increasingly ”transparent” and share its knowledge with everyone.
- Transparent economy: in order to preserve trade secrets as much as possible, the economy does not want a significant expansion of publication requirements.
- The transparent human: Open government and personalised services from the economy and the state should not lead to a situation where all information about citizens is available.
- The IT systems should fulfil their purpose precisely in accordance with the legal requirements; otherwise, they should be as little visible as possible (transparency in the sense of IT). Nevertheless, this transparency must also be transparent.

”“

Transparency of local government finances in Austria through Linked Open Budget Data

Paul Blasl wrote a paper shedding light on the publication of local government finances in Austria and problems that arise in connection with that:

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„While the act of publishing data in this way seems to be quite simple, the real challenges arise when it comes to the content itself. While the total expenditure of a town or even a country can be determined quite simple, more sophisticated questions like 'How much money does a city spend on local public transport?' are often hard to answer. The problem becomes worse if someone tries to compare the expenditures for local public transport in different municipalities all over Austria or even across the European Union. This is due to the fact that complex budgetary data is heterogeneous organized and published and therefore additionally not really comparable. Although, there exist common standards like UN's 'Classification of the Functions of Government' (COFOG) to classify government's expenditures, the allocation in those classifications (if appropriate and detailed ones exist anyway) differ from country to country or even from city to city within Austria itself. Besides most classifications are not that fine-grained to analyse detailed questions like the one about local public transport anyway. Furthermore, cash flows within the public sector can be quite complex on their own. The Austrian Fiscal Equalization is an extraordinary example for this.“

[44]

1.9.1 Relevance to business informatics

This master's thesis deals with transparency laws and related IT frameworks. As digitisation of public administration becomes more and more important, IT frameworks are used to provide public access. Transparency laws are the foundation for the selection of such frameworks.

The following courses provide the basic knowledge to research this topic from a legal and technical perspective in the context of information retrieval in the internet.

- 265.066 VU Daten- und Informatikrecht
  - basic structures of national law, EU law and international law as well as relevant context. Important sub-areas of IT law or current aspects of legal problems of the internet.
- 188.484 VU Informationssuche im Internet
  - Information Retrieval basics, Anatomy of Web Search Engines, SEO, Recommender Systems, Sociosemantic Web

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CHAPTER 2

Literature Research

We have read more than 250 scientific papers and collections of papers in order to get an overview of the scientific works in the field of government and state transparency.

The most interesting contributions are listed below, including a short introduction and the appropriate quote that gives an insight into the content to be expected.

We have explained our way of proceeding in chapter 1.4 on page 4, and we also have to mention that there are a lot of sources, which were not part of the scientific literature, that we listed in the unstructured search in 1.5.4 on page 7.

2.1 Structured Literature Search - Papers of Interest

2.1.1 State Transparency - Suitable and Relevant

Baghdady, Miriam: Public participation in the Water Framework Directive. A comparative review: Austria and France.[25]

This master's thesis from 2016 compares the public participation of people in France and in Austria in regard to the Water Framework Directive (WFD). It is strictly focused on the WFD, and without going into too much details about the comparison, it states that France has a rich history of public participation processes, whereas Austria prior to the WFD did not have that. Quote (page 59)[25]:

> „Thus, France already had experience in public participation process, which is why it is not surprising that Jager et al. considered France as a pioneer in this regard (Jager et al., 2016). In Austria, such structures did not exist prior to the WFD, but the longer this Directive exists, the more experience can be used to develop best practice examples and to find the right balance between ecological, environmental and economic interests.“

Blasl, Paul: Transparency of local government finances in Austria through Linked Open Budget Data. An analysis of the state-of-the-art and a prospect for future applications[44].

This diploma thesis from 2017 gives an overview of the legal basis and the basic knowledge about linked open budget data in Austria, including practical knowledge. It paints a clear picture of how the Austrian public sector economy is structured and how open data about finances should be published and which frameworks could be used in order to have linked open government data and therefore provide overviews about the local, state and central government finances in Austria. It also gives an overview of how well (if at all) the practice of providing open government data is established in neighbouring countries of Austria, citing from offenerhaushalt.at.

Quote (page 102):

> „The current status of Austrian implementations on Open Budget Data in general and Linked Open Budget Data, in particular, is somewhat devastating as can be read in chapter 3.1.3 of this Diploma Thesis.“

Quote [44] (page 102):

> „Nevertheless, there are exemplary exceptions from this rule. Although only eight datasets on each budgets and statements of account for municipal finances are available on Austria's Open Government Data platform "data.gv.at" at the time of this survey in August 2017, they include respective datasets for at least the three biggest cities in Austria: Vienna, Graz and Linz. All of them conform to the definition of Open Data and provide time series data for at least five years.“

Since the diploma thesis dates from 2017, it is not clear whether its findings are still valid.

Taylor, Natalie Greene; Christian-Lamb, Caitlin; Martin, Michelle H.; Nardi, Bonnie (Hg.): Information in Contemporary Society. 14th International Conference, iConference 2019, Washington, DC, USA, March 31–April 3, 2019, Proceedings (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 11420). Connecting Users, Data and Utilization: A Demand-Side Analysis of Open Government Data[345]

This is a collection of 78 papers

One of them seems interesting to us: **Connecting Users, Data and Utilization: A Demand-Side Analysis of Open Government Data" by Di Wang, Deborah Richards and Chuanfu Chen**

The authors of the study provide information about the users of open government data (OGD) and open government data portals. They conducted a survey among the Chinese

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population (208 participants) to analyse the possible relationship between OGD users, their requirements for data and their use. They concluded the following:

Quote [345] pages 497-498:

„

- Few users have ever known of or used OGD or portals set by governments. Users' occupation and education have an effect on their knowledge of OGD.
- Users show different degrees of demand for different OGD subjects. Their age, occupation and education affect their preferences for certain data subjects, while gender shows no effect on their preferences.
- Citizens chose to use OGD mainly to access data concerning daily life and anti-corruption, which are in line with the main aim of OGD programs. Their types of utilization have correlation with their education and knowledge of OGD. Gender, age and occupation show no significant effect on OGD utilization.
- Different types of utilization could lead to differences in the demand for OGD subjects.

“

Nievoll, Maria: Massenbewertung von Liegenschaften. Ein Vergleich international verwendeter Verfahren. [243]

In her diploma thesis (language german - 2018), Maria Nievoll deals with the transparency of real estate data in Austria. There are several systems with which real estate can be evaluated, some are in state and others are in private hands. They are decentralised and partly not compatible with each other, partly these data are available in paper form and are not always up-to-date or of high quality. Nievoll advocates the creation of a central and transparent state database for the valuation of real estate. Quote page 94:[243]

> „The introduction of a mass appraisal system for real estate in Austria would bring with it a wealth of positive effects from which not only the state but also banks, courts, authorities, private companies and the property owners themselves could benefit. One argument for the introduction of a mass appraisal system is its use in the valuation of real estate for tax purposes.“

Ladner, Andreas.; Soguel, Nils.; Emery, Yves.; Weerts, Sophie.; Nahrath, Stéphane. (Hg.): Swiss Public Administration. Making the State Work Successfully. 1st ed. 2019 (Governance and Public Management).[200]

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This paper describes in 397 pages how Swiss governance and public management works; not only does it talk about public participation, but also the Swiss freedom of information legislation:

Quote (p. 358)[200]:

> „*The Freedom of Information Act*
> Since their introduction, the SEVAL standards have encouraged transparency in evaluations. The 2004 introduction of the Freedom of Information Act in the Administration (FoIA) at the national level (implemented at the cantonal level) has made it possible to significantly strengthen such transparency, particularly because one can generalize access to the results of public policy evaluations. This act 'seeks to promote transparency with regard to the mandate, organization and activities of the administration' and contains an article specifically about evaluation: Access to reports on the evaluation of the performance of the Federal Administration and the effectiveness of its measures is guaranteed' (Art. 8(5), FoIA). This transparency can thus be active. Those who mandate an evaluation publicize the evaluations through various channels, including their websites, publications, or even press conferences. Yet it can also be passive, in which case the report must be communicated to the person (or agency) which requested it. "

2.1.2 State Transparency - irrelevant

Bungenberg, Marc.; Reinisch, August.: From Bilateral Arbitral Tribunals and Investment Courts to a Multilateral Investment Court. Options Regarding the Institutionalization of Investor-State Dispute Settlement. 2nd ed. 2020 (Special Issue).[54]

This special issue of the European Yearbook of International Economic Law has a chapter regarding transparency in Investor-State Dispute Settlements. This paper is not relevant to this thesis.

Curaj, Adrian.; Deca, Ligia.; Pricopie, Remus. (Hg.): European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies. 1st ed. 2018.[63]

This issue has several articles which mention transparency in the field of education. This paper is not relevant to this thesis.

Kő, Andrea; Francesconi, Enrico; Anderst-Kotsis, Gabriele; Tjoa, A. Min; Khalil, Ismail (Hg.): Electronic Government and the Information Systems Perspective. 8th International Conference, EGOVIS 2019, Linz, Austria, August 26–29, 2019, Proceedings. 1st ed. 2019 (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 11709). (3 Papers)[184]

1. **Towards Blockchain Technology to Support Digital Government - Reyan M. Zein and Hossana Twinomurinzi**

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This paper from 2019 conducts a systematic literature review in order to determine how the application of blockchain technology for digital governments has been researched. This paper is not relevant to this thesis.

2. **Designing an Effective Long-Term Identity Management Strategy for a Mature e-State - Silvia Lips, Krista Aas, Ingrid Pappel, and Dirk Draheim**

   This paper from 2019 describes the process of creating an ID strategy via public-private partnerships in Estonia, it's based on expert interviews of stakeholders who were part of this process. Its findings seem not relevant to this thesis.

3. **Toward Value Creation in e-Governance Through Digitalization – An Industry-Based Approach - Domonkos Gaspar and Katalin Ternai**

   This article from 2019 concerns transformation and change management but seems not relevant to this thesis.

2.1.3 Government Transparency - suitable and relevant

Schweighofer, Erich (Hg.): Transparenz. Tagungsband des 17. Internationalen Rechtsinformatik-Symposions IRIS 2014 ; 20. bis 22. Februar 2014, Universität Salzburg = Transparency : proceedings of the 17th International Legal Informatics Symposium. IRIS (Books@ocg.at, 302). [320]

In the proceedings of the 17th International Legal Informatics Symposium Iris 2014, Erich Schwaighofer and Friedrich Lachmayer give an insight into the topic of transparency in the context of law, politics and informatics. They describe the different definitions of the term transparency as well as freedom of information and talk about the tense relationship between transparency and privacy.

Quote (p. 45 - original)[320]:

> „ Rolf H. Weber hat mit seinem Dreieck von „Transparancy, Accountability and Partizipation“ das Dilemma sehr gut beschrieben. Transparenz ist demnach ein wesentlicher Pfeiler jedes Mitbestimmungsmodells des Bürgers. Es ist daher erforderlich, eine Lösung hinsichtlich des Gegensatzes von Datenschutz und Informationsfreiheit zu finden. Hier können das „Wiener Modell“ und das „Seattle Model“ gegenüber gestellt werden. In Wien werden öffentliche Daten potentiell noch eher unter einem Mantel der Amtsverschwiegenheit gehalten; in Seattle, WA, sind diese vollkommen frei zugänglich (https://data.seattle.gov). Seattle geht zu weit mit dem offenen Zugang zu höchstpersönlichen Daten, während Wien noch zu sehr in historischen Kontexten verhaftet bleibt. Es bedarf auch hier der Abwägung zwischen öffentlichem Zweck und Eingriff in die Privatsphäre.“

Quote (p. 45 - translation)

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„ Rolf H. Weber has described the dilemma very well with his triangle of "Transparency, Accountability and Participation". Transparency is thus an essential pillar of any citizen participation model. It is, therefore, necessary to find a solution regarding the opposition between data protection and freedom of information. Here, the "Vienna Model" and the "Seattle Model" can be contrasted. In Vienna, public data is potentially still more likely to be kept under a cloak of official secrecy; in Seattle, WA, it is completely freely accessible (https://data.seattle.gov). Seattle goes too far with open access to highly personal data, while Vienna still remains too entrenched in historical contexts. Here, too, there is a need to weigh public purpose against invasion of privacy.“

Fallon, Kris: Where Truth Lies. Digital Culture and Documentary Media after 9/11.[98]

This book looks at the digital culture and the media landscape in the USA between 2001 and 2016 leading to the election of Trump. Its chapter 5 - Technology, Transparency, and the Digital Presidency talks about the government transparency initiatives of Barack Obama. The book also lays some groundwork for the WHY of transparency and highlights the history of the developments that led to the US focusing on government transparency.

Quote (p. 122)[98]:

„Hine calls here on the full weight of long-standing Enlightenment connections between truth and social justice, drawing metaphorical and physical connections to the process of photographic exposure. In doing so, he tacitly channels the deep-seated liberal faith in the connection between the presence of information about a problem and resulting action toward social justice. This faith—that exposing a problem will result in its elimination—is one that runs throughout work on government transparency and political accountability, regardless of which medium is acting as the channel of transmission.“

Quote (p. 128)[98]:

„On January 21, 2009, on his first full day in office, Obama issued a presidential memorandum with the subject heading "Transparency and Open Government." Part of a move advocated by several government watchdog groups to embrace "openness on day one," the initiative outlined in the memo described his administration's approach to sharing information about the government and directed various individuals to coordinate an "Open Government Directive," which would revise standards for releasing information to the public.[REF] Reminiscent of the idealism surrounding his campaign and echoing the heady optimism surrounding Web 2.0 initiatives that had launched nearly

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> a decade earlier, the memo outlines three general principles to be followed by all federal agencies: (1) government should be transparent; (2) government should be participatory, and (3) government should be collaborative.“

> [REF] “President Obama Embraces Openness on Day One, as Urged by the National Security Archive and a Coalition of More Than 60 Organizations,” National Security A rchive, January 21, 2009, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/news/20090121/.

Hinterberger, Beate: Open government data in Vienna and London. Wien, Techn. Univ., Mag.-Arb., 2015.[156]

This Master's thesis evaluates on 113 Pages if the open government data of Vienna and London can be considered as a replacement for commercially available data. Its findings were that at least some data was suitable for commercial purposes, though some information was not available in a small enough granularity. Further interesting parts of the thesis are the history of open government data and also useful definitions, which still apply nowadays. On the other hand, it is uncertain if the findings from 2014 are still valid in 2022.

Quote (p. 15)[156]:

> „The idea of open government data is, to make government data available for the public, free of charge and with minimum constraints for reuse. This shall facilitate new business opportunities, enhance government transparency, encourage citizen engagement and distribute the costs of government data processing to communities.“

Hofmann, Sara; Csáki, Csaba; Edelmann, Noella; Lampoltshammer, Thomas; Melin, Ulf; Parycek, Peter et al. (Hg.): Electronic Participation. 12th IFIP WG 8.5 International Conference, ePart 2020, Linköping, Sweden, August 31 – September 2, 2020, Proceedings. 1st ed. 2020 (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 12220).[159]

Two papers deal with Open Government and Transparency. Noella Edelmann and Mary Francoli explore the connection between a government's membership in the Open Government Partnership initiative and their digital transformation. Another perspective of openness is pursued by Changwoo Suh, Byungtae Lee, Habin Lee, Youngseok Choi, and Sunghan Ryu. In their contribution, they identify which attributes of online games need to be disclosed to the market for policymakers.

Quote (p. 78)[159]:

> „Abstract. This paper explores the connection between membership in the Open GovernmentPartnership (OGP) and digital transformation. It employs a qualitative research approach and document analysis to examine

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> OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) Reports and government self-assessment reports to get a sense of the nature of digital transformation commitments made within OGP national action plans. This includes a look at what the commitments are, why they are made, and their results. Ultimately, it is found that while few OGP members focus on achieving digital transformation results, most are not leveraging their membership to advance digital transformation. Moreover, those that do are not doing so in a way that addresses a clear policy or governance issue, rendering it difficult to comment on whether the commitments are effectively advancing open government. The mandatory assessment of OGP action plans helps, to some degree, to drive members to complete their commitments, and serves as a useful tool for advancing policies as they relate to open government.“

Quote (p. 90)[159]:

> „Abstract. This paper identifies the main features of online games to be disclosed to the market for policymakers. It tests the positive relationships between information disclosure for online games and stock returns using the event analysis method. Based on data collected from online game companies between 2004 to 2009 in South Korea, the paper finds positive and significant correlation between game rating information and stock reactions. Specifically, the positive reactions are clear when a company introduces casual games, and a company has development capability. However, we do not find any significant relationships between stock reactions and voluntary information releases after the game rating information is released. The findings support the feasibility of introduction of mandatory information disclosure scheme for the online game industry.“

Kocakov, Ivan: Institutional Corruption in Europe. And the role of information and communication technology (ICT) and e-government.[185]

This master's thesis from 2017 by Ivan Kocakov Kirk analyzes the features of institutional corruption and identifies the role that information communication technologies and e-government can play within, thereby expanding the theory of institutional corruption.

The paper not only has a multidisciplinary view on those topics it also is a good starting point to learn not only about institutional corruption but as well about e-governance, open data, transparency in the EU and the US and and anti-corruption initiatives.

Quote (p 77)[185]:

> „Numerous factors are important for the success of e-Government as an anti-corruption initiative, such as technology access and penetration, literacy, and

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readiness of the society [BealO]. However, not only are there technical challenges, but also organisational processes that need to be redesigned. Furthermore, legal frameworks, leadership, and political motivation are needed to complement the digital tools [DF14].

Transparency alone is not sufficient for addressing corruption. The changes need to happen in both the institutions and the individuals who can access and analyze the information. Citizen engagement in politics is another important factor for success [DF14]. There are many ways in which citizens can provide feedback and report corruption, acting on the provided information; however, there is no single solution in every case. Some e-Government initiatives simply will not achieve the same results in a different context. Media and transparency-seeking NGOs could also be important factors for keeping government accountable. There is a need to integrate e-Government with anti-corruption strategies in order to achieve real impact [DF14]. Ultimately, an anti-corruption strategy depends on many factors, and individual solutions should be applied case by case. The distinction between systemic and institutional corruption is also important to be considered in developing e-Government projects, especially in Europe and North America, where the issue is being mostly overseen now. Corruption is rooted in political, economic, and cultural factors. e-government might not be able to solve all of them in society; however, it remains a strong tool for mitigating some of the critical enablers of corruption and improving the government-citizen relationship and trust.“

[DF14] T. Davies and S. Fumega. Mixed incentives. adopting ICT innovations for transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption. U4 Issue, 4 , 2014.

Kő, Andrea; Francesconi, Enrico (Hg.): Electronic Government and the Information Systems Perspective. 7th International Conference, EGOVIS 2018, Regensburg, Germany, September 3–5, 2018, Proceedings (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 11032).[183]

- **Connecting, Integrating and Empowering Society for Social Control Through Distance Education**

  Cristiano Maciel, Cassyra L. Vuolo, Taciana M. Sambrano, Alexandre M. dos Anjos, Ana Paula Kuhn, and Claudia Oneida Rouiller

  This article is about the joint effort of different government institutions in Brazil to introduce innovative digital technology as a tool used in Distance Education to integrate and empower the community, promote citizen control and thus create public value. This enables access to and engagement of citizens from different

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backgrounds and led to the development of new concepts and ideas embedded in these environments.

Quote (p 120)[183]:

> „In general, innovations greatly contribute to the success of the remodeled version of the course. The School of Accounts deserves merit for their unceasing effort to minister the course with the usual excellence that exceeds the standards of the courses normally offered by distance education. The total numbers are significant: 2,567 people were encouraged to exercise social control through this training, with representatives in 100% of the municipalities that are members of the PDI, in addition to 22 students from other federative states. In the context of the presented debate, we found that, through this course, students were able to acquire more significant degree of understanding of the forms of controls reserved to the public administration, such as social, external and internal control, thus promoting the institutional empowerment of public policy councils insofar as they encouraged refresher courses for council members and offered training for the citizen to become more active in the community.“

- **The Right to Know and Digital Technology: Proactive and Reactive Transparency in the Italian Legal System Fernanda Faini and Monica Palmirani** This paper focuses on proactive and reactive transparency in the Italian legal system. It provides an overview about how the legal system concerning transparency has changed between 2013 and 2016. It gives us a short overview of the legal situations in the USA the UK and France, then talks about the evolution of the “right to know” in Italy. Italy now has both: proactive disclosure – where the government makes documents available by themselves without the public having to ask for them, and reactive disclosure, where publication is the response to a request.

  Quote (p 169)[183]

  > „... there are three forms of access now in force in Italy as tools of reactive disclosure: (1) access to records (accesso documentale), pursuant to Law 241/1990, which stands as valid law; (2) “broad public access” (accesso civico generalizzato), pursuant to Legislative Decree 33/2013 and introduced by Legislative Decree 97/2016; and (3) what is now called “simple public access” (accesso civico semplice), which is the previously recognised right of access that can be exercised in response to failure of a government agency to comply with public disclosure requirements [8, 15]. These changes have proven necessary in order to make sure that the right to know is fully protected.“

  Quote (p 173)[183]

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„Although the Italian system suffers a certain complexity, the right to know is now protected in our system as a fundamental right, unlike the past, which provided for procedural transparency confined by the existence of specific normatively foreseen conditions. While in the past, it was the citizen who had to demonstrate the possession of the legitimate conditions, now with the Broad Public Access the administration has to prove that there are grounds for exclusion against knowledge: therefore, it is acceptable to consider that the legislative decree No. 97 of 2016 constitutes the Freedom of Information Act of the Italian legal system [10, 12, 20].“

- **Quality Issues of Public Procurement Open Data** by **Csaba Csáki and Eric Prier**

  This paper is a suitable introduction to European Open Data. With the intention of investigating the potential impacts of public procurement on the society the autors give us insight into the journey of experiencing Open Data. Not only does the paper provide a brief introduction to Open Data, it lists sources, gives us a description for beginners on how to find and use open data and also talks about common pitfalls when using these data.

  Quote (p 188)[183]

  „ The result of this case study suggests the following set of generalised issues that end-users consider when preparing to work with open data.

  - Find the data (availability): check for the data source to be authentic and whether the data is up to date and if it came with adequate and up-to-date description and sufficient documentation;
  - Download (accessibility): open data may come in many different formats, and its size could be large and is often composed of several files or parts;
  - Open, Load, Check (readability): make sure that you have several tools available and that their settings fit the requirements of the data format – if something does not look right, try different language, coding and location settings;
  - Transform (technical qualities of the data): open data often looks different in different tools, and transformation of different formats might be necessary - special support or expertise may be required to decide which tool fits best (don't stick with a tool just because that is the only one you know). Loading the data into any management tool requires several steps of preparation such as assessing the types and sizes of fields as well as obtaining and applying the proper settings during the load;
  - Assessment (content, structure): while using the guide, if available, be careful - there might be errors, missing information, or the data

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structure might be so complex that substantial domain expertise might be required to understand both the meaning and the structure of the data;

- Link (traceability): open data is rarely standalone and is often composed of several parts or related/connected datasets. It has (should have) references within the area covered, but it might use references to other sets (i.e. country codes, national abbreviations etc.): pay special attention and double-check all such references for correctness;
- Manipulate (ease of use, usability): search out and find an explanation for duplicates, missing values or even missing or omitted fields;
- Interpret, analyze (use, value, fit-for-purpose): depending on the issues uncovered during the earlier steps, the researcher might need to reconsider the questions that could be meaningfully answered from the dataset in actual use (which often differs from the intended use);

special attention should be paid to any generated statistical results, which obviously depend on records/fields/values.
“

- **Open Data Research Challenges in the EU** by **Csaba Csáki and Andrea Kő**

  This paper from 2018 uses the latest research, papers and studies in the field of open government data to offer recommendation on which directions potential researchers could take to increase our knowledge and understanding of challenges in the reuse of public sector information. It gives an introduction to the history of open government data as well as open data and its reuse in the EU. It also talks about the evolution of Governmental Open Data portals and frameworks. We would recommend this paper to anyone starting research in the field of open government data, though we have faced problems with the references: some of them are not freely available for us (students of the TU Vienna) at the time of writing this thesis.

  Quote (p 193)[183]:

  „Strictly speaking the term ‘open data’ as an expression with special meaning may be dated from the 2006 manifesto of the Open Knowledge Foundation [7, 35], although that call was mainly a generic proposal, as it also concerned scientific and other data. Data may be called ‘open’ if it is freely accessible in machine-readable format and it is (legally) free to be used, reused, or redistributed for any purpose [35] – typically assuming that the source is attributed and the results are shared [29]. Open government data as a special area on its own emerged towards the end of the first decade of this century when it was brought into focus as part of the (rejuvenated) open government movement [2, 34]. The core of the

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open government concept is that citizens have the right to get access to data, information and documents generated by governments as well as to public sector procedures involved [8].“

- In-Paper Sources:
  * 2. Bates, J.: The strategic importance of information policy for the contemporary neoliberal state: the case of open government data in the United Kingdom. Gov. Inf. Q. 31(3), 388–395 (2014)
  * 7. Davies, T., Perini, F.: Researching the emerging impacts of open data: revisiting the ODDC conceptual framework. J. Community Inform. 12(2), 148–178 (2016) 8. Dawes, S.S., Helbig, N.: Information strategies for open government: challenges and prospects for deriving public value from government transparency. In: Wimmer, M.A., Chappelet, J.-L., Janssen, M., Scholl, H.J. (eds.) EGOV 2010. LNCS, vol. 6228, pp. 50–60.
  * 29. Lindman J., Rossi, M., Tuunainen, V.: Open data services research agenda. In: Proceedings of HICSS-46, pp. 1239–1246 (2013) 34. Obama, B.: (U.S. Executive Office): Open government directive (2009). http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda2010/m2010/m10-06.pdf Accessed 7 Aug 2017
  * 35. Open Knowledge Foundation: Open Knowledge Definition (2006). http://www.open definition.org/. Accessed 7 Sept 2017

Kő, Andrea; Francesconi, Enrico; Anderst-Kotsis, Gabriele; Tjoa, A. Min; Khalil, Ismail (Hg.): Electronic Government and the Information Systems Perspective. 8th International Conference, EGOVIS 2019, Linz, Austria, August 26–29, 2019, Proceedings. 1st ed. 2019 (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 11709).[184]

This is a collection of scientific papers from this conference

- The paper **Open Data Ecosystems: A Comparison of Visual Models** by **Csaba Csáki** analyses various open data visual models that have appeared in relevant literature. It aims at preparing the foundation for an open ecosystem model visual notation.

- The paper **Designing an Effective Long-Term Identity Management Strategy for a Mature e-State** by **Silvia Lips, Krista Aas, Ingrid Pappel and Dirk Draheim** focuses on the process of creating the new Estonian strategy for identity management and identity documents with the objective of understanding best practices and bottlenecks in the process of creating the ID strategy.

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- **OntoMetrics Evaluation of Quality of e-government Ontologies** by **Jean Vincent Fonou-Dombeu(B) and Serestina Viriri** identifies and evaluates existing e-government ontologies on the web. They adopt the OntoMetrics ontology evaluation framework to provide insights on the accuracy, understandability, cohesion and conciseness of these models.

Balakrishnan, Kogila: Technology Offsets in International Defence Procurement. 1st edition (Routledge Studies in Innovation, organisations and Technology).

This book discusses on 194 pages offsets in the defence industry. It not only gives an introduction to offsets, but also discusses their development and practices in great detail. Chapter 8 of ten chapters is called „transparency in offsets“ where literature is reviewed that puts the question if an offset is a corrupt practice. There are many mentions of the work of transparency international and their findings. Among other measures, the author recommends that the authorities responsible for offsets increase transparency in the management of offsets.
Quote (p 125)[27]:

> „offsets authorities should carry out a post-independent offsets audit to measure the success of an overall offsets programme. This report should be made public such as through distributed ledger without having to expose any commercially sensitive information.” This work is especially interesting for people interested in offsets, also the links to the works of Transparency International are of high interest. „The 2010 TI report had identified three main categories of corruption risks in offsets: first, it is alleged that offsets could be improperly used to influence a decision; second, that offsets could be used as a conduit to bribe government officials and third, that offsets could allow for a competitive decision to contract award be made in a non-transparent way. However, these risks are not unique to offsets and are common to any government procurement environment. The 2010 report also identified three possible opportunities for key vulnerabilities for offsets corruption to occur being political corruption, bureaucratic and private sector corruption which are all again vulnerabilities that are possible in not just offsets but in a defence procurement or other contract scenarios (Magahy, Vilhena da Cunha and Pyman, 2010 , pp. 40–47). However, the report should be highlighted for its recommendations made specifically to reduce corruption in offsets, to increase awareness and to develop business ethics around offsets (Fluker, Muravska and Pyman, 2010).“

Themistocleous, Marinos; Da Rupino Cunha, Paulo (Hg.): Information Systems. 15th European, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern Conference, EMCIS 2018, Limassol, Cyprus, October 4-5, 2018, Proceedings (Lecture Notes

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in Business Information Processing, 341).[351] Information Systems 15 European Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Conference 2018

There were 42 papers that got submitted, 34 full papers and 8 short papers, being categorised into 8 tracks, all relevant papers were part of the track e-government:

- **GE-government: A Geographic Information Based E-government Citizens' Adoption Framework** by **Dennaoui and Angelika I. Kokkinaki**

  This paper investigates the geographic information influence on e-government adoption by citizens, it also introduces its own e-government citizens' adoption framework. They also performed a literature review examining how geographic information is relevant to e-government services and identifying aspects that may affect e-government adoption by citizens. The literature review showed no evidence of any published e-government model considering geographic information as an independent factor having impact on e-government citizens' adoption.

  What we liked about this paper is that their literature review has other sources and, therefore can make backed up statements about transparency:

  Quote (p 283-284)[351]:

  > „The e-government services can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. e-government employment may lead to less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions. Studies on the subject have been conducted in different contexts including developed countries [18, 25, 51, 59, 60] as well as in developing countries [32, 44].“

  Inline Sources:

  - 18. Davidrajuh, R.: Realizing a new e-commerce tool for formation of a virtual enterprise. Ind. Manag. Data Syst. 103, 434-445 (2003)
  - 25. Frank, L.: Architecture for integration of distributed ERP systems and e-commerce systems. Ind. Manag. Data Syst. 104, 418-429 (2004)
  - 32. Gupta, K.P., Singh, S., Bhaskar, P.: Citizen adoption of e-government: a literature review and conceptual framework. Electron. Gov. Int. J. 12(2), 160-185 (2016)
  - 44. Kurunananda, A., Weerakkody, V.: e-government Implementation in Sri Lanka: lessons from the UK. In: Proceedings of the 8th International Information Technology Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka (2006)

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- 51. O'reilly, T.: What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software, Published on O'Reilly (2005). (http://www.oreilly.com/)
- 59. Siau, K., Long, Y.: Synthesizing e-government stage models- a meta-synthesis based on meta-ethnography approach. Ind. Manag. Data Syst. 105, 443-458 (2005)
- 60. Siau, K., Tian, Y.: Supply chains integration: architecture and enabling technologies. J. Comput. Inf. Syst. 44,67-72 (2004)

- **Factors Affecting Intention to Use E-government Services: The Case of Non-adopters** by **Stellios Rallis, Dimitrios Chatzoudes, Symeon Symeonidis, Vasillis Aggelidis, and Prodromos Chatzoglou**[351]

  This study investigates factors that have an impact on the intention to use a government services. Those factors are empirically tested on a framework developed by the team using primary data collected by the government located in Greece.

  Quote (p 306-307)[351]:

  > „The proposed conceptual framework of this study has been developed after an extensive literature review and has been empirically tested on a sample of 513 internet users.
  >
  > The main conclusion drawn from the empirical results is that both researchers and practitioners should examine and manage a bundle of factors (dimensions), which seem to be highly interrelated, when considering the use of e-Government applications from non-users. Thus, they should not only pay attention to enhancing a rather limited number of factors, since the emergence of various indirect effects underlined the need for a more integrated approach.
  >
  > As far as the impact of each individual factor on the intention of non-users to use e-Government is concerned, it is concluded that although Perceived Usefulness is found to have the highest direct impact, Peer Influence seems to have the highest total (direct and indirect) impact. [25] also found that external resources, such as television/news, significantly influence not only early-adopters, but also non-adopters of e-Government. By providing proper information to citizens (through the internet or in the form of leaflets), the state can bend the bias that exists towards online services [5, 50].“
  >
  > Inline Sources:
  >
  > - 5. Alghamdi, S., Beloff, N.: Towards a comprehensive model for e-government adoption and utilisation analysis: the case of Saudi Arabia. In: 2014 Federated Conference on Computer Science and Information Systems, pp. 1217–1225, September 2014. https://doi.org/10.15439/2014F146

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- 25. Hung, S.Y., Chang, C.M., Yu, T.J.: Determinants of user acceptance of the e-government services: the case of online tax filing and payment system. Gov. Inf. Q. 23(1), 97–122 (2006). https://doi.org/10.1016/J.GIQ.2005.11.005
- 50. Ziemba, E., Papaj, T., Descours, D.: Assessing the quality of e-government portals-the polish experience. In: 2014 Federated Conference on Computer Science and Information Systems (FedCSIS), pp. 1259–1267. IEEE (2014)

- **Transparency Driven Public Sector Innovation: Smart Waterways and Maritime Traffic in Finland** by **Vaida Meskauskiene, Anssi Öörni, and Anna Sell**

  This paper examines transparency driven innovation in the field of maritime digitalization and autonomous shipping in Finland between 2016 - 2018. The research uses action research methodology to two forms of transparency driven innovations, Open Data Innovation (opening up government processes) and Open Door Innovation (transforming service delivery). We especially liked this quote from the learnings, because it seems relevant to the Austrian challenges in improving government transparency:

  Quote (p 342)[351]:

  > „Therefore important to understand not only how government organisation perceive the challenges of open innovation, but the factors that hinder or may foster the implementation. Main issues identified in our research study include the lack of interest and slowness to react to calls for innovation from developers in both open door and open data initiatives; quality of radical innovations provided by companies (due to widespread availability of IoT solutions and prevailing hardware competence amongst companies involved in marine ecosystem); low quality of user ideas (excessive use of similar datasets leading to numerous similar apps), officials' sceptical attitudes towards user ideas and new comer companies in innovation space, and the lack of transparency in supportive processes/structure/resources in public service organisations. We further discuss how these main organisational transparency issues can be resolved (see Table 1) by accessing its three key dimensions underpinning transparency suggested by Schnackenberg and Tomlison: disclosure, clarity, accuracy [13]. To address varying and, in certain aspects, low degree of information transparency, we identify key organisational capabilities and related actions that FTA maritime organisation should take: competence, communications, commitment and culture.“
  >
  > –

  Inline Sources:

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13. Schnackenberg, A.K., Tomlison, E.C.: Organizational transparency: a new perspective on managing trust in organization-stakeholder relationships. J. Manag. 42(7), 1784–1810 (2014).
https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314525202

Smotrova-Taylor, Olessia.: How to Get Government Contracts. Have a Slice of the 1 Trillion Dollar Pie. 1st ed. 2012.
Its main purpose is to explain how to get US Government contracts. It mentions transparency as a means to get information about competitors that also apply for the same contracts. The book argues that Freedom of Information Act request, which includes competitors' cost and technical proposals, are not the negative but lead to a More Level Playing Field that a better company which is truly dedicated to service will end up better off.

2.1.4 Government Transparency - suitable but irrelevant

Sonnleitner, Julia: Demokratieforum am Schwedenplatz/Morzinplatz. Demokratie neu gedacht. Durch Partizipation zu einer lebendigen Demokratie.[330]
This paper is about workshops on the understanding of democracy that have been held. Transparency is also mentioned in this paper. However, the topic is only touched on marginally and it is not really dealt with to the extent that would be necessary for this master's thesis.

Jahankhani, Hamid; Kendzierskyj, Stefan; Chelvachandran, Nishan; Ibarra, Jaime (Hg.): Cyber Defence in the Age of AI, Smart Societies and Augmented Humanity. 1st ed. 2020 (Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications).
This book is a collection of papers that fit to the topic. It is very focused on artificial intelligence systems. Therefore most of the time transparency is mentioned. This happens in regard to artificial intelligence.

"Considerations for the Governance of AI and Government Legislative Frameworks" by Nishan Chelvachandran, Sonja Trifuljesko, Karolina Drobotowicz, Stefan Kendzierskyj, Hamid Jahankhani and Yelda Shah mentions transparency in regards to the Ethically Aligned Design Framework:

> „The Ethically Aligned Design Framework from IEEE defines agreed ethical and values-based design, development and implementation of AI systems, guided by the following principles: ...
>
> • Transparency *The basis of a particular AI decision should always be discoverable*" [169, S. 62–63]

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The next and only other paper mentioning transparency is a case study on the Estonian e-government with the purpose of identifying how feasible it is to securely and effectively implement e-governance in a developed country. It reviews the usage of different technologies to facilitate e-government and e-governance, leading to more transparency. This paper gives insights into how e-government works, but it is merely a deep dive into distributed ledger technology, smart contracts and the blockchain. It does not talk about transparency in regard to freedom of information requests; therefore this paper, as well as the others, is not relevant to our thesis.

2.1.5 Transparenz - suitable and relevant

Bröthaler, Johann (2015): Open Budget Data – Offenheit und Transparenz öffentlicher Haushalte in Österreich. In: Der öffentliche Sektor.[47] Translated Title: Open Budget Data - Openness and Transparency of Public Budgets in Austria. In: The Public Sector.

This journal article highlights the developments and framework conditions for public budgets in Austria, successively lists the development of the transformation of the Austrian administration in relation to Open Government data, and shows the problem areas in relation to public budget management in Austria.

Not only is the legal basis and the changes in Austrian budgets due to provincial and EU laws and directives presented. A clear picture is also drawn of the current state of development and what the desired future development of open budget data would look like. Quote (p. 37)[47] - German Original:

> „Zusammengefasst existiert eine behördeninterne Budgetdateninfrastruktur, in der sämtliche Anforderungen der nationalen und internationalen Finanzstatistiken abgebildet werden und die eine direkte Verknüpfung mit den Haushaltssystemen und eine weitgehende Automatisierung des Erhebungsprozesses bietet. Die erhobenen Budgetdaten werden von Statistik Austria nur in aggregierter Form weitergegeben, jedoch keine Einzeldaten veröffentlicht (auf Grundlage der Geheimhaltungsbestimmungen für Daten, die in §19 (2) und (3) im Bundesstatistikgesetz 2000 idgF geregelt sind). Ebenso sind gesammelte Finanzdaten der Gemeinden auf Gemeindeportalen einzelner Länder nur behördenintern verfügbar.“

English Translation:

> „In summary, an intra-agency budget data infrastructure exists in which all requirements of national and international financial statistics are mapped and which offers a direct link to the budget systems and extensive automation of the collection process. The budget data collected are only passed on by Statistics Austria in aggregated form, but no individual data are published

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> (on the basis of the confidentiality provisions for data regulated in §19 (2) and (3) of the Federal Statistics Act 2000 as amended). Likewise, collected financial data of the municipalities on municipal portals of individual federal states are only available internally to the authorities.“

Fallmann, Andrea: E-Partizipation in der Raumplanung. Zeitgemäße BürgerInnenbeteiligung durch den Einsatz internetgestützter Verfahren.[97]
Translated Title: E-Participation in Spatial Planning. Contemporary citizen participation through the use of internet-based procedures.

This 2016 paper compares e-participation with local forms of participation in the field of spatial planning. It discusses the criteria of e-participation forms, explores their strengths and weaknesses and looks for forms of application in spatial planning. In the course of the work, both the EU growth strategy Digital Agenda 2020 presented in 2010 and the eGovernment Vision 2020 of Austria are discussed, in each of which transparency is an important aspect. One of the conclusions of this work is that the success of eParticipation also depends on transparency.

Quote (p. 87)[97] - German Original:

> „Der Erfolg von E-Partizipation ist im Wesentlichen abhängig von den drei Kategorien: Umsetzung & Aufbereitung, Transparenz sowie Betreuung des Angebots. Die Qualität der Aufbereitung dieser Kategorien und Kriterien ist entscheidend und verhilft bei guter Umsetzung zu mehr Akzeptanz, bei schlechter Umsetzung führt dies jedoch zu Misstrauen. Die genannten Kategorien bauen jedoch auf anderen Kriterien auf, welche ebenfalls nicht vernachlässigt werden dürfen.“

English Translation:

> „The success of eParticipation essentially depends on the three categories: Implementation & preparation, transparency as well as the support of the offer. The quality of the preparation of these categories and criteria is decisive and helps to achieve more acceptance if the implementation is good, but it leads to mistrust if the implementation is poor. However, the categories mentioned build on other criteria, which should also not be neglected.“

2.1.6 Transparenz - irrelevant

Monitoring Bericht 2017 Homeier Ina[162]

The word transparency appears three times, but it is used more as a catchword. The most detailed connection of transparency with the topic is the word explanations in the glossary. In fact, this paper deals with the topic of transparency only indirectly in the

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sense of providing data and an overview, but not in the sense of the right to information, increasing the right to information and citizen participation.

Peneder, Jeremias: Öffentliche Interessen in Infrastrukturprojekten. Messung, Bewertung, Abwägung. Wien, Techn. Univ., Dipl.-Arb., 2015.[260]
Translated Title: Public Interests in Infrastructure Projects. Measurement, evaluation, balancing. Vienna, Vienna University of Technology, Dipl.-Arb., 2015.

This diploma thesis from 2015 deals with infrastructure projects and addresses the question of how public interests can be defined. The background to this is that in Austria, land use decisions are made with regard to different interests. In this context, public interests can be considered as a justifying reason for interventions in previously undamaged areas. Transparency is certainly an important aspect of this topic, but the focus of the work is on the search for a uniform definition of public interest. To this end federal and state laws are analysed and categorised in detail.

But since there were big changes in the law in December 2017, see Chapter 1.7 on page 8, we no longer consider this work to be up to date and would not draw any generally valid conclusions from it.

Rainalter, Sabine: Umsetzung der Open Science Initiative der EU Kommission in Österreich. Dargestellt am Beispiel der Technischen Universität Wien[274]
Translated Title:
Implementation of the EU Commission's Open Science Initiative in Austria. Presented using the example of the Vienna University of Technology

This master's thesis from 2017 deals with Open Access and Open Research Data. It discusses the motives for the EU Open Science Initiative, as well as the ways and goals of Austrian researchers to achieve these goals and the incentives needed to realise the Open Science Initiative. This work provides good definitions of Open Access and Open Research Data and is good at outlining the advantages and criticisms of both Open Research Data and Open Access, with the most important problematic aspect being the copyright issue.

For researchers on these topics, this work is certainly well suited to create and consolidate basic knowledge; for research on state transparency and access to legislation as well as citizen participation, this work does not offer a sufficient basis to be categorised as relevant for us.

We hope that by listing the most important papers and providing detailed citations, we can give people who want to read up on a specific area of transparency an overview of which of these papers are most suitable for them. In addition, however, we have to recognise that, internationally, there are also very specialised papers on the topic of transparency, which we did not have the opportunity to address due to university structures and access rights to libraries, as we were already unable to access them. We

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hope that all European universities will work to pool their resources in the spirit of open research.

2.1.7 Summary of the Literature research and its findings

Doing literature research in the field of state and government transparency is a big effort, which is being complicated by the fact that transparency itself is a word used commonly in many scientific disciplines.

While we regarded about 90 per cent of the papers to be unsuitable, we see added value in the rest as a source of information.

Unfortunately, some of it was already outdated due, on the one hand, to the short-lived nature of the freedom of information laws and, on the other hand, to the constant changes in the legal situation as a result of amendments to the law and court decisions.

Technological progress contributes to the fact that one cannot readily assume that evaluations in this area (e.g. a paper comparing the data quality of Open Data data-sets from the cities of Vienna and London) will remain valid. We strongly advise against conducting meta-analyses on this topic area due to the specificity of this topic.

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CHAPTER 3

Qualitative Expert Interviews

3.0.1 Procedure

We already discussed the approach taken for conducting the preliminary and the guided interviews in chapter 1.8 on page 9. Our search for interview partners aimed to find experts in 3 different fields, namely a) journalism b) NGOs and activists that use and/or advocate state and government transparency and c) public officials who would be working with transparency laws by providing the information. While it turned out, that it was easier to find people in journalism and NGOs that are willing to be interviewed, it was harder to find a single person from the administration. When asking for interview partners many public officials denied to give us interviews. The most commonly named argument was, that they thought they are not qualified enough to give an interview, often they referred to experts in the ministry, who were more experienced in that matter. Sadly those experts, who were mostly also working on the upcoming new Austrian transparency law were not willing to participate in the interviews.

We did find however one person working in the field of technical implementation of transparency (he is working in the federal computing center) in Austria, who we then also interviewed.

There were 10 participants, only one decided during the interview that they want to remain anonymous, the other 9 agreed to be named. At the time of the interviews 6 interviewees lived in Austria, 3 in Germany and one in the Netherlands. All conducted expert interviews took place between 7.Febuary 2021 and 26.Febuary 2021.

The unwillingness of some officials to participate in the interviews could lead to a certain bias. We believe that the opinion of those who call for more transparency is more strongly represented, while that of civil servants and government officials in Austria who are not so positive about transparency is too short. All transcripts and their translations are available in full text in the Appendix - chapter 5 on page 103

3.1 Aggregation of the content of the qualitative expert interviews

We started the interviews with some simple questions to break the ice and to ease the participants' nervousness so that they would feel more comfortable to give honest answers. First we put some organisational questions, whether recording was allowed or whether people preferred to be anonymised. Then we asked a question which provide us insight into the work of our interviewees.

3.1.1 Which regions are affected by the work of our interviewees?

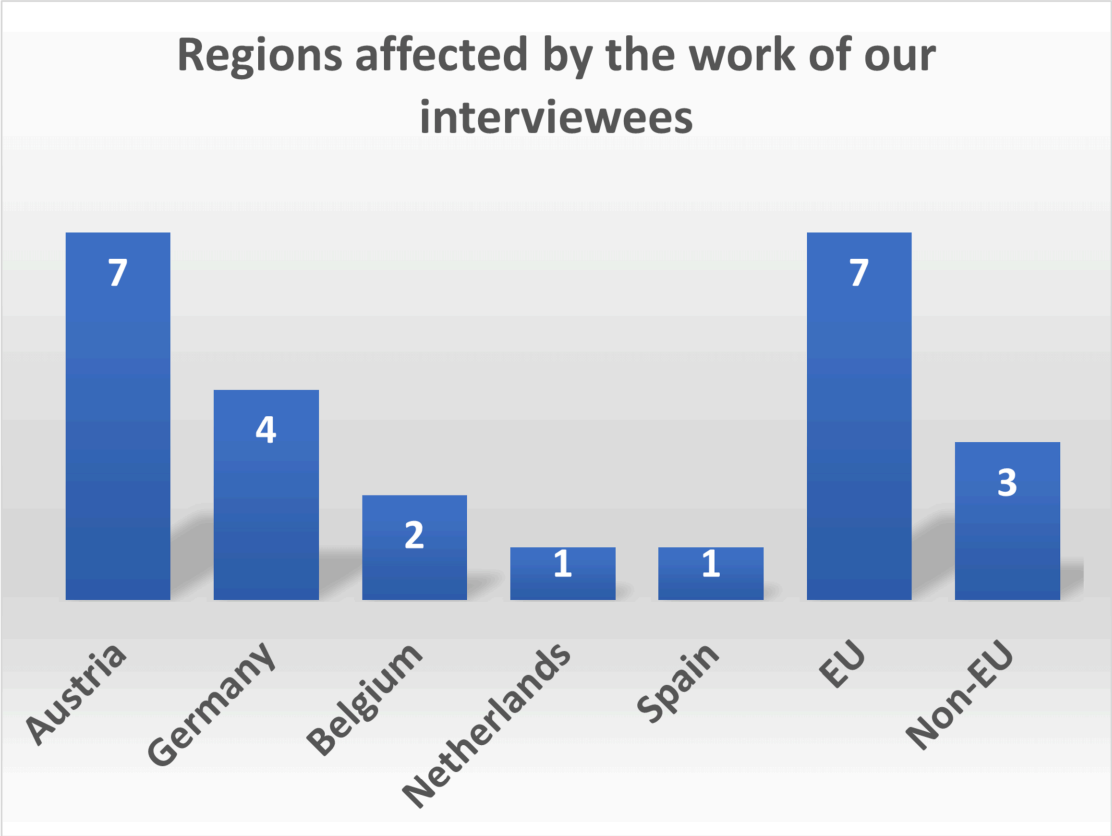

Figure 3.1: Regions affected by the work of our interviewees. Answers: 7 Austria, 4 Germany, 2 Belgium, 1 Netherlands, 1 Spain, 7 EU, 3 Non-EU

We asked participants which countries were mostly affected by their work and most of them named German-speaking parts of the EU. People with journalistic background mentioned DACH (D=germany, A=Austria, CH=Switzerland) countries as their main audience, but also EU in general, because they also report about EU topics. Only a minority of people answered that non EU countries were affected by their work.

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3.1.2 Is the government and state transparency something you come in touch with in your daily (or monthly) work? If yes, please describe how?

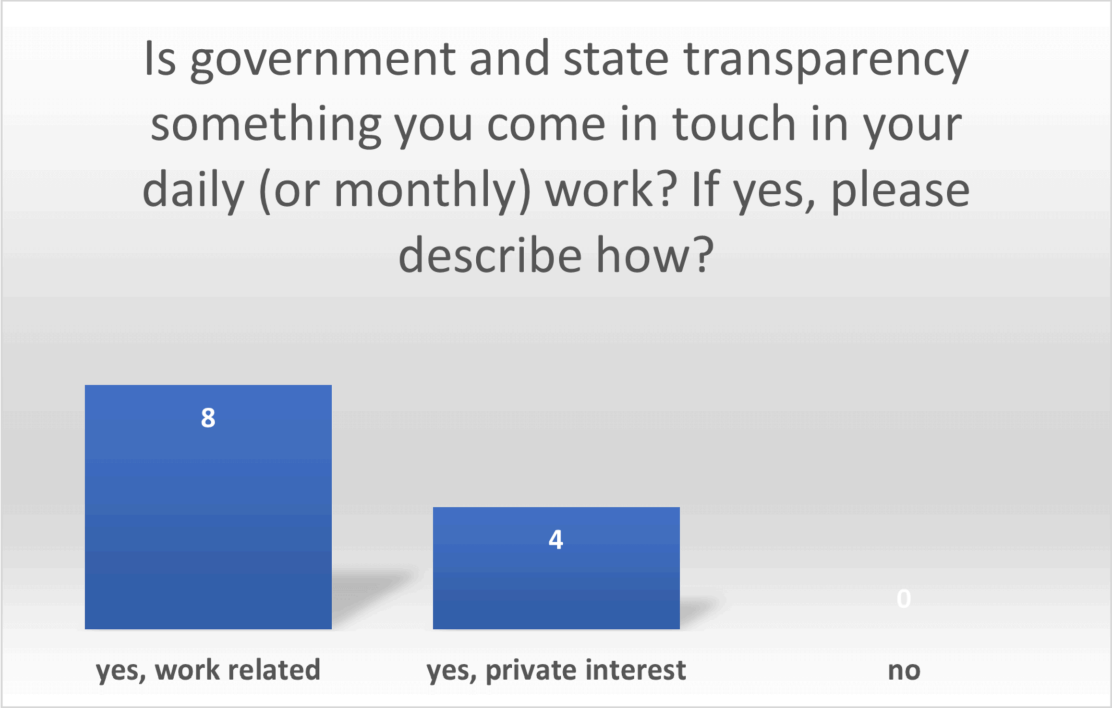

Figure 3.2: Is government and state transparency something you come in touch in your daily (or monthly) work? If yes, please describe how? Answers: Yes, work related - 8. Yes, private interest - 4. There were 10 participants, multiple answers were possible

When being asked if government and state transparency was present in their daily (or monthly) work all of them answered yes. For 8 of them the topic was work related, for four of them private. Since double answering was possible, that means that for six people it was only work related, for two it was only a private interest and for two people both was the case.

None of the interviewees have answered that state or government transparency was not part of their regular work (work including unsalaried or voluntary work).

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3.1.3 Have you worked with laws on the regional, country-level or EU level that enable you to access information held by public authorities (right to information)?

Figure 3.3: Have you worked with laws on regional, country or eu level, that enable you to to access information held by public authorities (right to information)? Answers: 7 Yes, 2 No, 1 We provide a platform enabling public officials to provide data to citizens

Most interviewees have worked with, or used RTI laws, one of them had to specify his answer, because he was running a platform as a service provider to the government which enables public officials to provide data, that can then be used by citizens. For more info to that specific answer see chapter 5.1.14

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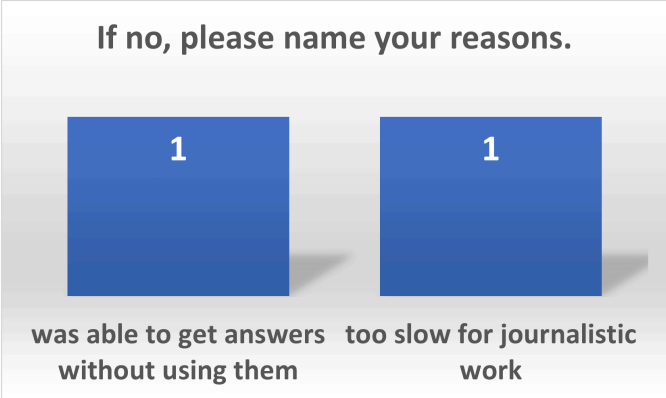

Figure 3.4: Follow-Up Question to: "Have you worked with laws on Regional, Country or EU level, that enable you to to access information held by public authorities (right to information)?" If no, please name your reasons. Answers: Was able to get answers without using them: 1, Too slow for journalistic work: 1

3.1.4 If No, why not?

Two interviewees – both of them journalists – who said No in the previous question specified, that RTI Laws were either too slow for journalistic work or that they were able to get answers to their questions without using them and therefore did not use them in their regular work.

"too slow for journalistic work" was further specified as (Chapter 5.1.4 Page 124):

> „I would either see no chance of getting the information or to put it bluntly, I'm wasting my time because this is the part where they will say, like, oh, this is why we can't give you this information. So we have some (...) prices for the weakest excuses to not give you information. So it makes more sense to watch these prices, to see how you get stonewalled, than to ask for yourself as it's a waste of time."

The response "was able to get answers without using them" referred to the time before Covid19 (Chapter 5.1.7 Page 149):

> „In my more than 15-year career as a journalist, I have received answers from all authorities up to the year 2020. That's why it was simply not necessary up to that point. In 2020, however, things changed. With the pandemic, it actually happened that no deadlines that had been given were met at all, and you simply didn't get any answers at all. This affected all ministries, from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Health. Journalists' inquiries were simply no longer answered."

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Those changes in communication have led this journalist to overthink their point of view and switch to making FOIA requests (Chapter 5.1.7 Page 149):

> „Actually, this should be my first right to information request, because I totally failed with my previous journalistic methods. With the Ministry of Health, on the other hand, it was simply the case that you made an inquiry and heard nothing for days.“

3.1.5 On which Level have you worked with laws, that enable you to access information held by public authorities?

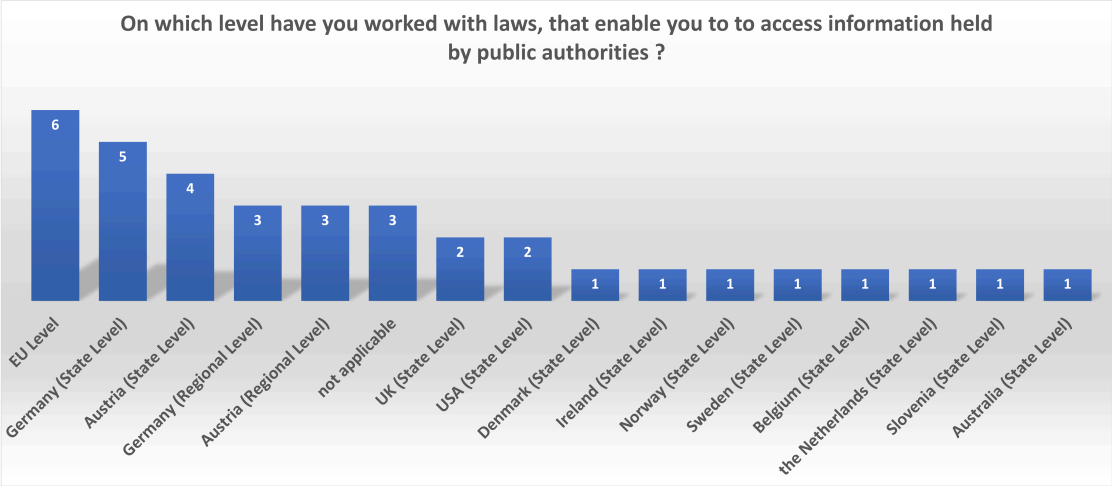

Figure 3.5: On which Level have you worked with laws, that enable you to access information held by public authorities? Multiple answers possible.

Interviewees who have worked with RTI and transparency laws before did so mostly on EU Level (6), German State Level(5) and Austrian State Level (5) as well as German Regional Level(3) An Austrian Regional Level (3). Other State Level requests have mostly been done in European countries UK(2), Denmark(1), Ireland(1), Norway(1), Sweden(1) Belgium(1), the Netherlands(1), Slovenia(1).

The only countries outside Europe that have been named in this regard were the USA (2) and Australia (1). None of the people we interviewed made Freedom of Information requests in South America, Africa or Asia.

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3.1.6 What are your experiences with "Right to Information" laws?

Figure 3.6: What are your experiences with "Right to Information" laws?

Though these questions are not results from quantitative but qualitative interviews, we find it interesting, that some experiences were shared amongst the interviewees.

The mostly shared experience was that information were not given out.

Quote "So we are speaking about what I perceive as wilful cases of obstruction by the institutions to release information." Chapter 5.1.5 Page 138

Quote "There were a few negative experiences with authorities not making information available and trying to use excuses so they don't have to publish things which can be a little bit frustrating." Chapter 5.1.15 Page 191

Some answers were not given with the argument of security of the state, people who had done a lot of requests reported that they "hit many brick walls".

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The second most mentioned experience was a long answering time.

Quote "The only negative is perhaps that most requests the authorities have taken a relatively long time and used the deadline quite a bit." Chapter 5.1.9 Page 156

Quote "So, the first experience is they are incredibly slow, it usually takes more time to obtain actual information than anyone could estimate from reading the plain text of the law. So, of course, the law says that most requests would be done within one month or should be dealt with within two weeks. But this usually applies to the first stage. And then administration has become quite skilled in invoking exemptions and possible methods for delaying these requests. So. It is not uncommon for me to be engaged in a single Freedom of information law request that takes about a year from the first request to the final notification on my request." Chapter 5.1.11 Page 168

In some cases interviewees believed, that denial of information was unlawful, some did engage in legal battles to aquire the requested information - some of those legal battles were still pending at the time of the interviews, others avoided legal challenges though they believed, that their claims would be deemed right in the end:

Quote "I have never gone to court to enforce my rights, which I see is something I probably should have done in some cases." Chapter 5.1.5 Page 138

Experiences vary from person to person and there are mixed positive and negative experiences. None of the participants of the interviews were of the opinion that government transparency was a bad idea, quite the opposite. Two of them said that government transparency was powerful to hold governments to account or that it creates positive pressure. It was there to obtain information interesting to oneself and others.

Besides positive experiences and the already mentioned deadline problem, there were a lot of mixed problems concerning governments and institutions not providing answers. In one extreme case, an interviewee reported that his enquiry about a contract between the UK and Austria was answered by the UK authorities but not by the Austrian authorities because they claimed that the contract had to be kept secret. This case is still pending before a court in Austria.

Quote "The UK government apologized repeatedly for the delays because they had to censor some information in the documents, but I received the documents from the UK from one of the owners of the Eurofighter company, while Austria claimed there was a secrecy agreement between Austria and Eurofighter, which is why they can't give me anything. That case is actually currently waiting for a decision at the Supreme Administrative Court in Austria, but it has been waiting there for one and a half years. And one of the main points of contention there is, is that I asked for the contract. And in Austria, the law that enables me to ask for information

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from public bodies, does not explicitly grant access to documents." Chapter 5.1.13 Page 179

Based on expert opinion we suspect that the reported unwillingness to provide information, that occured in some cases might have to do with a political culture, that is present in Austria:

Quote "...the people, the public officials that have to oblige to such rules are often not too happy about it, because for once they think that they have to protect the people they have information about." Chapter 5.1.12 Page 174

3.1.7 What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law?

We asked our interviewees which key aspects they believed had to be part of an RTI law and put their answers into these categories listed in Figure 3.7 or below in detail.

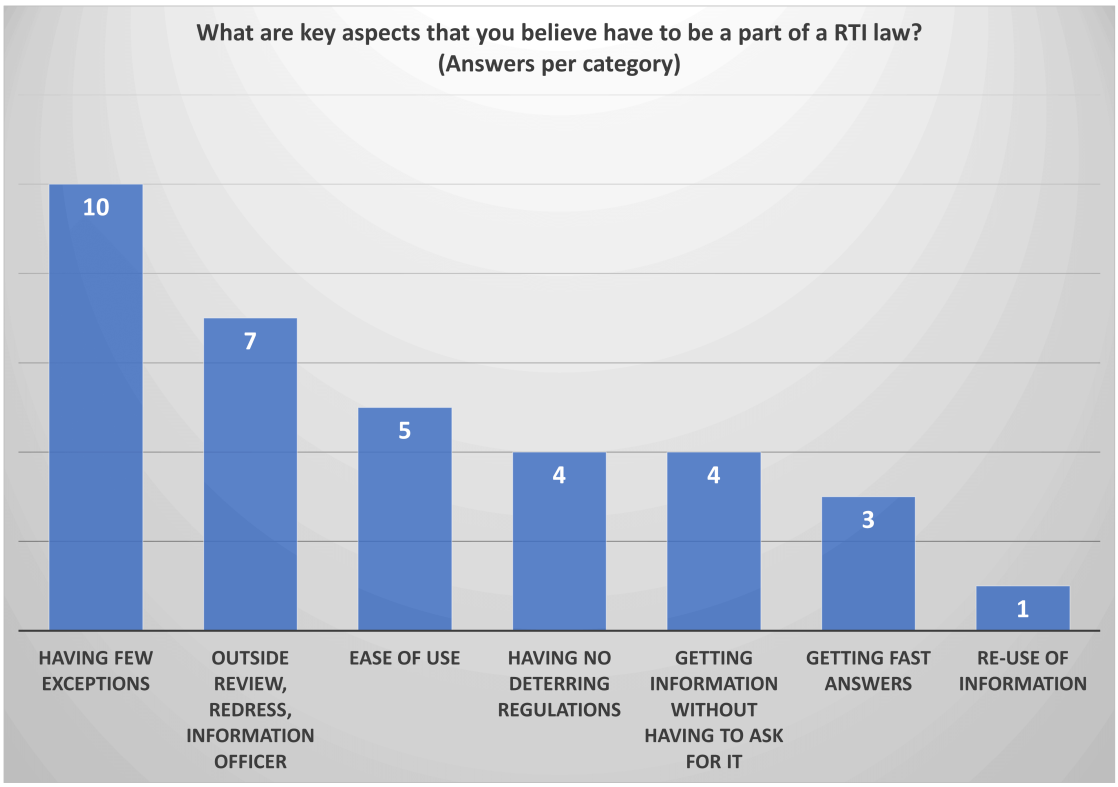

Figure 3.7: What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a RTI law? (Answers per category)

Having few Exceptions (10x)

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"As few exceptions as possible" (1x)

"Not using privacy as general excuse for not giving out data" (1x)

"There should be few exceptions, state security being one, rather not any others" (1x)

"It should have very limited exceptions, of course, some exceptions make sense, such as personal data and national security, but with every exception, there should be a balance. So if the information is very relevant and it's really important to make public, exceptions from the exceptions should also be possible" (1x)

"Important things is having limited exceptions are restrictive interpretations of applicable exception" (1x)

"Commitment to access to documents" (1x)

"Commitment to partial access of documents - if part of document needs to stay non public that part should be blacked out instead of not giving out the whole document" (1x)

"Everything should be accessible. Everything that is done by the administration, by the public administration, should be accessible if there is no law that something has to stay secret" (1x)

"Barrier for getting transparency on contracts shouldn't be too high, e.g. 1000 €" (1x)

"It should cover all public authorities, including things like companies that belong to the state, private companies that entirely belong to the state, that are under the control of the state, including the "Verfassungsschutz" [Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV)] and yeah, just all all public authorities" (1x)

Outside Review, Redress, Information Officer (7x)

"Outside review with binding decisions" (1x)

"Redress possible without need to go to court" (1x)

"Having an information officer" (2x)

"There should be two organisations, one to help the public looking for information and the other one helping the administration in providing information" (1x)

"Law enforcement should be part of the law, courts that decide if information was rightfully denied out or wrongfully not given out should have access to that information" (1x)

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"There should be an ombudsperson (...) if an authority doesn't want to give out the information, citizens should be able to go to an ombudsperson and that ombudsperson should ideally also have the right to force the authority to release the information if the ombudsperson thinks that that's the correct thing to do. So in Germany currently they can only say: 'Oh, we think that you should publish it for these reasons.', but the final decision is still with the authority and not with the ombudsperson. So ideally, the ombudsperson should have that right" (1x)

Ease of use (5x)

"It should be easy to get the request right, so that it won't get denied" (1x)

"And then there are a couple of more elements, such as access to one, access to many components. So if anyone actually requests some information and it's released to a person, it should be made available to anyone else, without any further procedure" (1x)

"Easy to use for anyone" (2x)

"Should be easy to manage on both sides" (1x)

Having no deterring regulations (4x)

"There should be no costs or only low costs for citizens, if answer to request is very long (for example 10,000 pages in print)" (2x)

"The right of access to information should always be free. There should be no cost associated with it." (1x)

"Simple requests should be free of charge. " (1x)

Getting Information without having to ask for it (4x)

"Should be a duty for government institutions to make transparent information on a proactive basis, so they should publish the key information about their filing structure and all the information required to enable anyone else to actually file meaningful access to information requests. So it should be possible to obtain a list of all files available from administration before having to actively request them. " (3x)

"Certain proactive information duties for public bodies like all of the contracts, all of their studies, all of their statistics should be open by default" (1x)

Getting fast answers: (3x)

"Time limits should be shorter." (2x)

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"Hard deadlines in such a law and there should be a two tier approach. First the right to get help from the ombudsperson that exists in a state, and secondly, to call on the courts to enforce freedom of information." (1x)

Re-Use of Information: (1x)

"Component for reuse, so if information is released to a person after a Freedom of Information request, the person should have the rights to actively disseminate and make public this information without having to fear of any kind of copyright infringement, for example, or violation of state secrets and so on. " (1x)

3.1.8 Summary

The user-friendliness of a right to information law is essential. Otherwise, people will be deterred or less likely to request such information. To encourage implementation, exemptions should be kept to a minimum and where justified exemptions apply, redactions must result in all other information being released rather than leading to the non-release of entire documents.

Some responses indicated the need for a structural change in Austria where the principle of official secrecy would have to be replaced by a transparency principle (i.e. where secrecy is the exception and not the rule). This would include the possibility of external review, legal remedies and the establishment of information commissioners.

Access to information should not be hindered by disincentives such as prohibitive costs for requests. A shift towards a culture of transparency should ensure that information is made available by default and thus there are fewer reasons for individual requests. Such legislation should also include measures to ensure the relevance and timeliness of responses, as respondents complain about the long response times of public officials.

Another problem, although mentioned only once, is the re-use of information, which is a pressing issue. People receive a response to their request, but publication is prohibited, e.g. due to copyright issues. This limits the sharing of this information and can lead to requests being made more than once, adding unnecessary administrative burden.

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3.1.9 Which of these aspects are currently missing to you (and on which legislative level)?

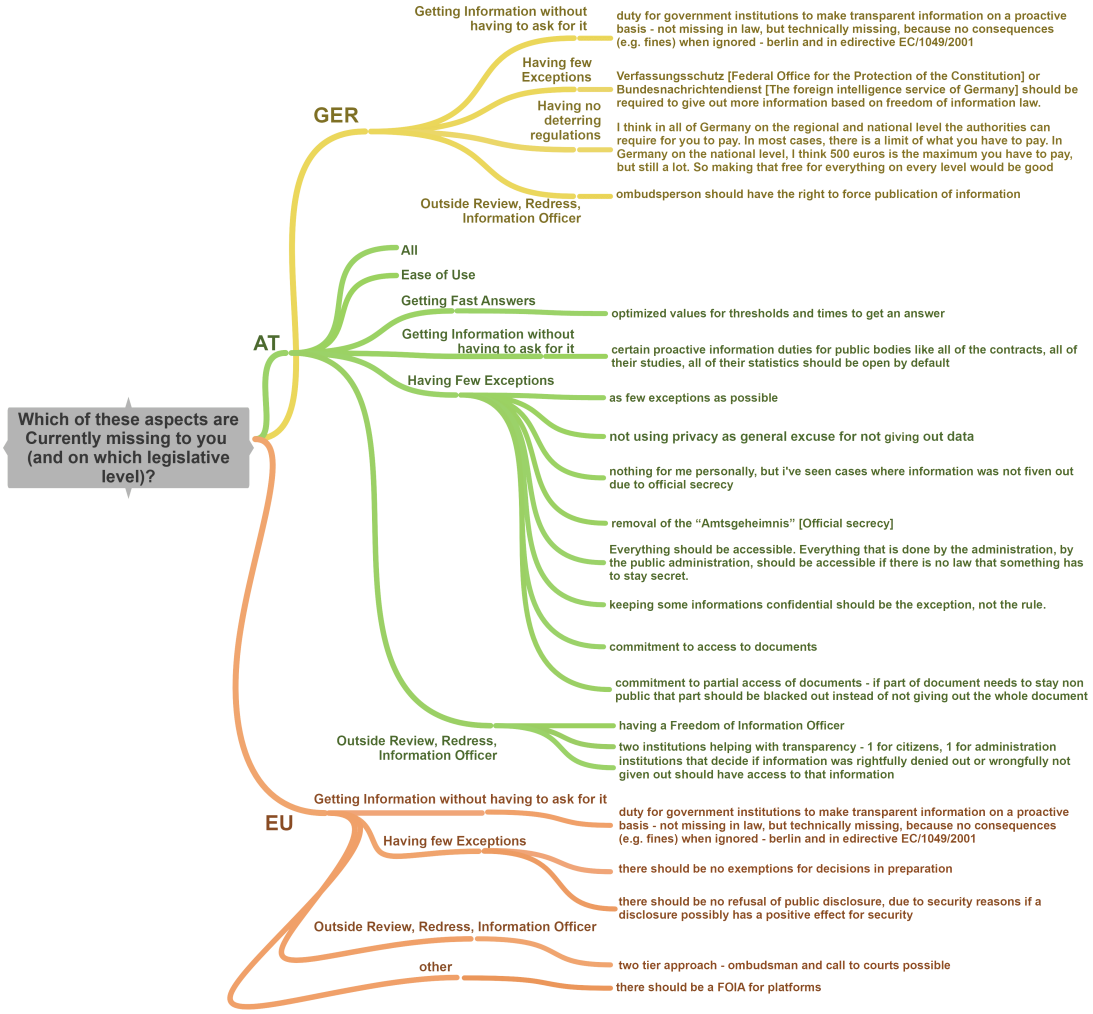

Figure 3.8: Which of these aspects are currently missing to you (and on which legislative level)? The results of the expert interviews were summarised in the form of a structured mind map. They are presented here as a whole and subsequently divided to allow for better readability.

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Germany

Germany has a freedom of information law (Informationsfreiheitsgesetz) since Jan 1st 2006, which we consider slightly better than the Austrian status quo. Here are the experts points for critique with the german law, by category and in detail.

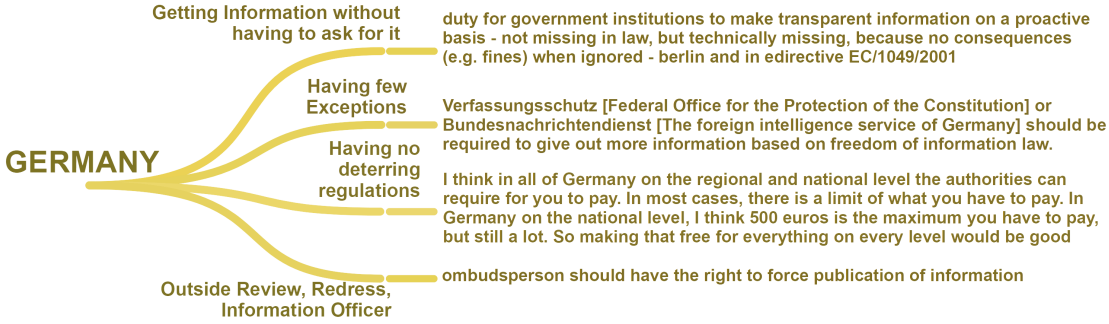

Figure 3.9: Which of these aspects are currently missing to you (and on which legislative level)? Detailed for Germany

Getting Information without having to ask for it (1x)

"duty for government institutions to make transparent information on a proactive basis - not missing in law, but technically missing, because no consequences(e.g. fines) when ignored - berlin and in edirective EC/1049/2001" (1x)

Having few Exceptions 1x)

"Verfassungsschutz [Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution] or Bundesnachrichtendienst [The foreign intelligence service of Germany] should be required to give out more information based on freedom of information law." (1x)

Having no deterring regulations 1x)

"costs: I think in all of Germany on the regional and national level the authorities can require for you to pay. In most cases, there is a limit of what you have to pay. In Germany on the national level, I think 500 euros is the maximum you have to pay, but still a lot. So making that free for everything on every level would be good." (1x)"

Outside Review, Redress, Information Officer (1x)

"ombudsperson should have the right to force publication of information" (1x)

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Austria

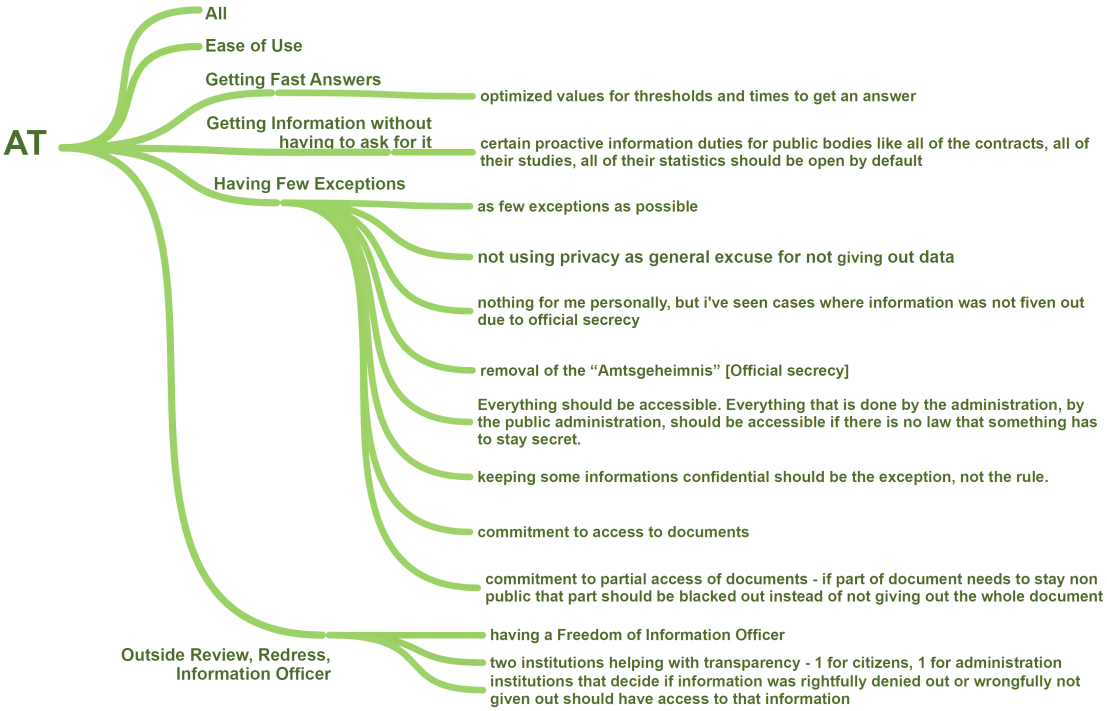

Figure 3.10: Which of these aspects are currently missing to you (and on which legislative level)? Detailed for Austria

ALL (1x)

"all of them are missing" (1x)

Ease of use (1x)

"Ease of use" (1x)

Getting fast answers (1x)

"optimized values for thresholds and times to get an answer" (1x)

Getting Information without having to ask for it (1x)

"certain proactive information duties for public bodies like all of the contracts, all of their studies, all of their statistics should be open by default" (1x)

Having few Exceptions (11x)

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”as few exceptions as possible” (1x)

”not using privacy as general excuse for not giving out data” (1x)

”nothing for me personally, but i’ve seen cases where information was not given out due to official secrecy” (1x)

”removal of the “Amtsgeheimnis” [Official secrecy]” (2x)

”Everything should be accessible. Everything that is done by the administration, by the public administration, should be accessible if there is no law that something has to stay secret.” (2x)

”keeping some informations confidential should be the exception, not the rule.” (2x)

”commitment to access to documents” (1x)

”commitment to partial access of documents - if part of document needs to stay non public that part should be blacked out instead of not giving out the whole document” (1x)

Outside Review, Redress, Information Officer (11x)

”having a Freedom of Information Officer” (1x)

”two institutions helping with transparency - 1 for citizens, 1 for administration” (1x)

”institutions that decide if information was rightfully denied out or wrongfully not given out should have access to that information” (1x)

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EU

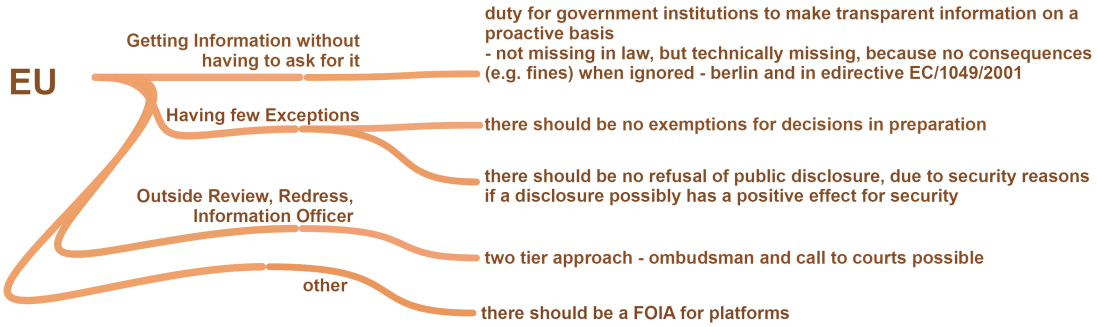

Figure 3.11: Which of these aspects are currently missing to you (and on which legislative level)? Detailed for the EU

Getting Information without having to ask for it (1x)

"duty for government institutions to make transparent information on a proactive basis - not missing in law, but technically missing, because no consequences(e.g. fines) when ignored - berlin and in edirective EC/1049/2001" (1x)

Having few Exceptions (2x)

"there should be no exemptions for decisions in preparation" (1x)

"there should be no refusal of public disclosure, due to security reasons if a disclosure possibly has a positive effect for security" (1x)

other (1x)

"a FOIA for platforms" (1x)

Outside Review, Redress, Information Officer (1x)

"two tier approach - ombudsman and call to courts possible" (1x)

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3.1.10 Have you worked with the Austrian so-called "Auskunftspflichtgesetz"?

Figure 3.12: Have you worked with the Austrian so-called "Auskunftspflichtgesetz"? Yes: 4, No: 5, Don't want to talk about it: 1

Nearly half of our interviewees have worked with the Austrian so-called Auskunftspflichtgesetz - which is the name for the Austrian right to information law. We suspect, that the ratio is not 4:5:1 (yes/no/don't want to talk about it), but might actually be 5:5 (yes/no). We believe, that the fact, that someone does not want to talk about it at all highly indicates, that this person has already worked with this law before. This suspicion is also strengthened by a quote of the person who did not want to talk about it.

> "Die Diskussion um das Amtsgeheimnis verfolgt uns schon etliche Jahre. Viele Informationen sind nicht einsehbar, deshalb kann man etwa politische Entscheidungen im Nachhinein nicht evidenzbasiert evaluieren", sagt Harm [36]

Translation: "'The discussion about official secrecy has been haunting us for several years. A lot of information is not accessible, which is why it is not possible to evaluate political decisions in retrospect in an evidence-based manner', says Harm"

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3.1.11 What positive, neutral and negative experiences did you have?

What positive, neutral and negative experiences did you make?		
Green = Positive, Yellow = Mixed, Red = Negative	Nr.	Category
Request take long	2	Response time
Authorities use deadlines to the end	2	Response time
Well, it is positive that it exists, and so it has been a first step from the administration secrecy to the new age, but it is only a first step	1	Better than nothing but not enough
And so it is better than to have nothing. But on the other hand it is of course not sufficient for a modern society	1	Better than nothing but not enough
It is quite bureaucratic. It triggers a large administrative process	1	Bureaucratic
Relatively positive experience	1	For me it works
One request wasn't answered at all	1	Obtaining answers
Restriction to only answer to queries and not give out documents, which is significant weakness of the law	1	Obtaining answers
Made 3 requests to my municipality, after being called by major. I discussed with him and later withdrew 1 request, I did get the information though, but not publicly. I did not feel pressurized. I think it was reasonable to not have this information public, if I wanted I could have made it public though.	1	Obtaining answers
Information not given due to security of the state	2	Obtaining answers
Have to go to court in order to get information	1	Obtaining answers
They are mostly bad in Austria. They're a mixed bag everywhere	1	Overall bad impression
People are still suspicious. Sometimes people who request information are seen as kind of people who who just ask questions to bother the public officials and not because they really want and need some information.	1	Public officials are suspicious of people making requests

Figure 3.13: What positive, neutral and negative experiences did you make?

In this section we dive deep into the experiences of our respondents. Figure 3.13 shows the answers, the number of respondents who gave that answer and the corresponding category. The following colour code is used: Red means that we consider the statement to be negative or rather negative. Orange stands for statements that have both positive and negative characteristics, and positive statements are marked in green.

The sole purely positive answer came from one participant reporting that freedom of information mostly worked in his case while sharing some experiences which he believes could have deterred other people from making requests, but not him. This answer was categorised as "for me it works".

However, most answers concerning the Austrian right to information legislation were

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either mixed or clearly negative, with the most used category being "obtaining answers" - 6 statements, (thereoff five negative) followed by answering time - 4 statements (4 negative) a category we called "better than nothing, but not enough" (2 statements) and one statement per category "bureaucratic", "overall bad impression", "public officials are suspicious of people making requests" all of them being rated as negative.

3.1.12 Which frameworks for RTI requests do you use?

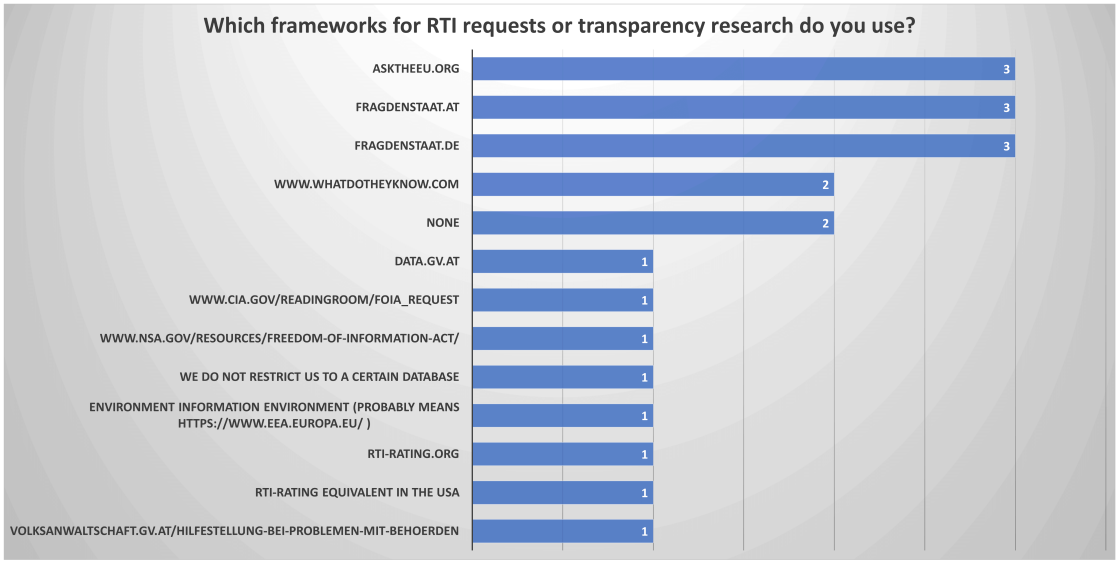

Figure 3.14: Which frameworks for RTI requests do you use?

The frameworks for RTI requests, that our interviewees are using the most are asktheeu.org, fragdenstaat.at and fragdenstaat.de. All these frameworks were mentionned three times. Two people named e-mail, which definitely is not a framework and therefore was removed from the list (We are certain, that all interviewees are familiar with e-mail otherwise we would have not been able to invite them to our interviews). Two people named whatdotheyknow.com, two of them said none. This could be an indication that they use email or letters. One interviewee told us not to be restricted to a certain database. One mentioned the "environment information environment", which we believe means www.eea.europa.eu). rti-rating.org also got mentioned once, though it's not a framework per se, but a website that analyzes transparency laws. It was also mentioned that an equivalent website to rti-rating.org with focus on the US existed, but could not be named. Last but not least, the following frameworks or websites were also named once: data.gv.at www.cia.gov/readingroom/ www.nsa.gov/Resources/Freedom-of-Information-Act volksanwaltschaft.gv.at/hilfestellung-bei-problemen-mit-behoerden.

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3.1.13 What are the positive Aspects of these Frameworks?

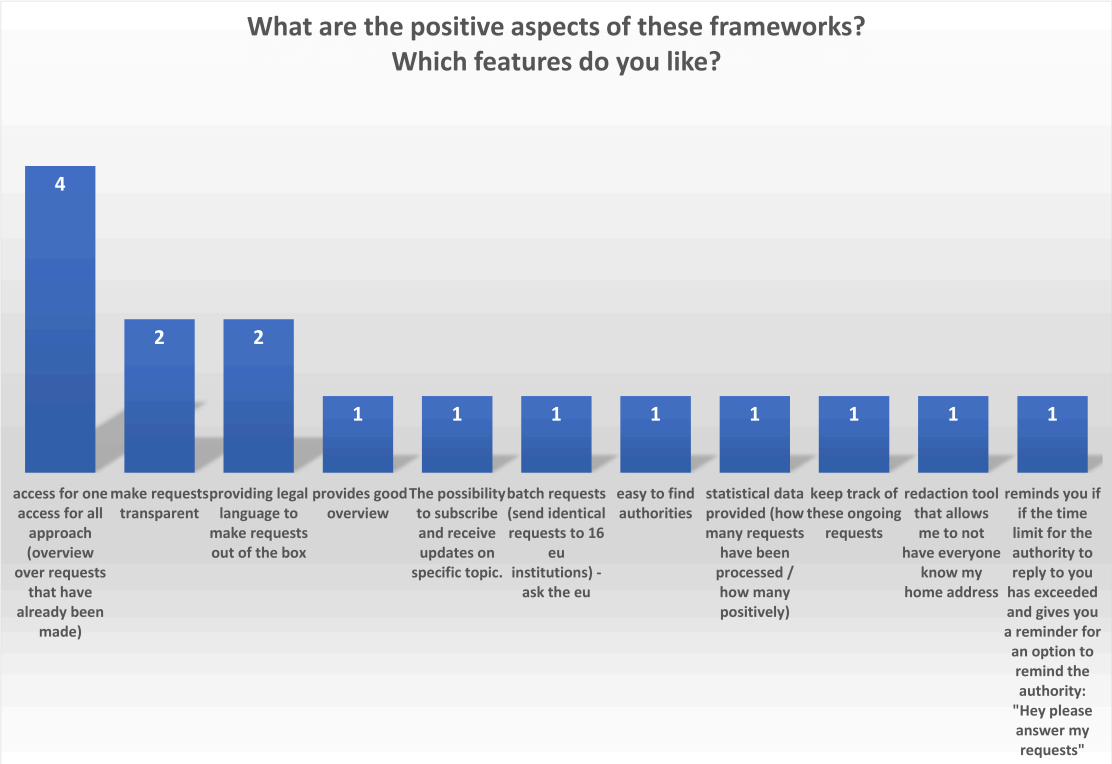

Figure 3.15: What are the positive Aspects of these Frameworks? Which features do you like?

Answers by Category (Sum of answers: 16)

access for one access for all approach (overview over requests that have already been made) (4x)

make requests transparent (2x)

providing legal language to make requests out of the box (2x)

provides good overview (1x)

The possibility to subscribe and receive updates on specific topic. (1x)

batch requests (send identical requests to 16 eu institutions) - asktheEU (1x)

easy to find authorities (1x)

statistical data provided (how many requests have been processed / how many positively) (1x)

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keep track of these ongoing requests (1x)

redaction tool that allows me to not have everyone know my home address (1x)

reminds you if the time limit for the authority to reply to you has exceeded and gives you a reminder for an option to remind the authority: "Hey please answer my requests (1x)

3.1.14 What are the negative aspects of these frameworks?

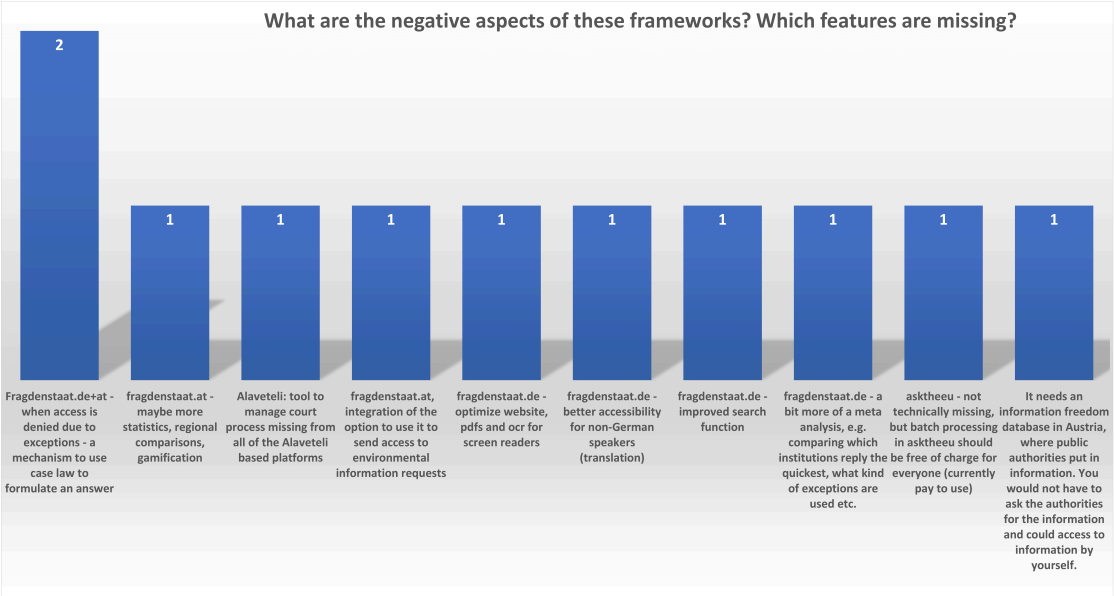

Figure 3.16: What are the negative Aspects of these Frameworks? Which features are missing?

What are the negative aspects of these frameworks? Which features are missing? (Sum of answers: 11)

Fragdenstaat.de+at - when access is denied due to exceptions - a mechanism to use case law to formulate an answer (2x)

fragdenstaat.at - maybe more statistics, regional comparisons, gamification (1x)

Alaveteli: tool to manage court process missing from all of the Alaveteli based platforms (1x)

fragdenstaat.at, integration of the option to use it to send access to environmental information requests (1x)

fragdenstaat.de - optimize website, pdfs and OCR for screen readers (1x)

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fragdenstaat.de - better accessibility for non-German speakers (translation) (1x)

fragdenstaat.de - improved search function (1x)

fragdenstaat.de - a bit more of a meta analysis, e.g. comparing which institutions reply the quickest, what kind of exceptions are used etc. (1x)

asktheeu - not technically missing, but batch processing in asktheeu should be free of charge for everyone (currently pay to use) (1x)

It needs an information freedom database in Austria, where public authorities put in information. You would not have to ask the authorities for the information and could access to information by yourself (1x)

3.1.15 Which frameworks for RTI requests do you know?

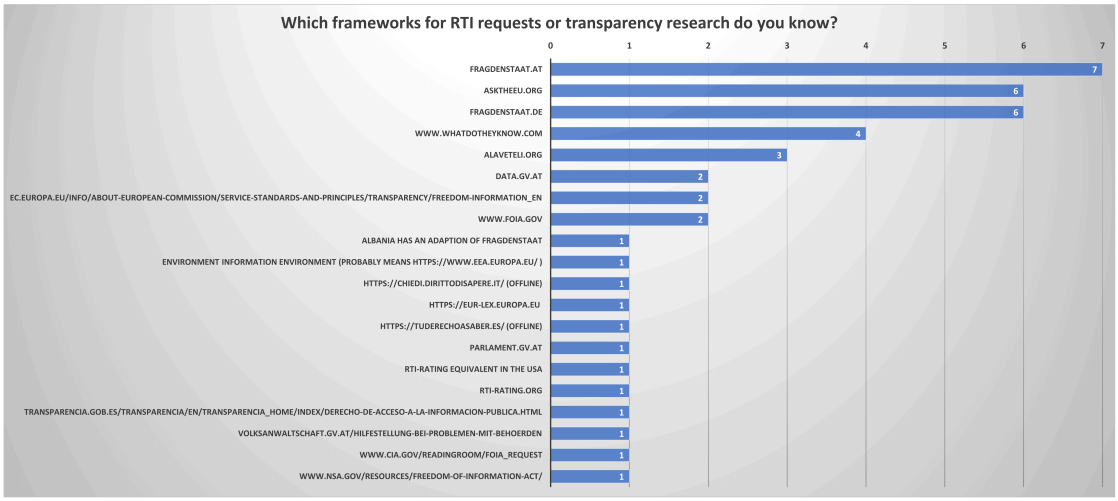

Figure 3.17: Which frameworks for RTI requests or transparency research do you know

Which frameworks for RTI requests or transparency research do you know? (Sum of answers: 34)

fragdenstaat.at (7x)

asktheeu.org (6x)

fragdenstaat.de (6x)

www.whatdotheyknow.com (4x)

alaveteli.org (3x)

data.gv.at (2x)

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ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/transparency/freedom-information_en (2x)

www.foia.gov (2x)

Albania has an adaption of fragdenstaat (but we could not find it) (1x)

environment information environment (direct quote, we believe it is this website: https://www.eea.europa.eu/ (1x)

https://chiedi.dirittodisapere.it/ (offline) (1x)

https://eur-lex.europa.eu (1x)

https://tuderechoasaber.es/ (offline) (1x)

parlament.gv.at (1x)

rti-rating equivalent in the USA (we could not find out what was meant) (1x)

rti-rating.org (1x)

transparencia.gob.es/transparencia/en/transparencia_Home/index/Derecho-de-acceso-a-la-informacion-publica.html (1x)

volksanwaltschaft.gv.at/hilfestellung-bei-problemen-mit-behoerden (1x)

www.cia.gov/readingroom/foia_request (1x)

www.nsa.gov/Resources/Freedom-of-Information-Act/ (1x)

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3.1.16 Could you decide for one specific framework that should be the standard framework for you on a country level? If yes, which one?

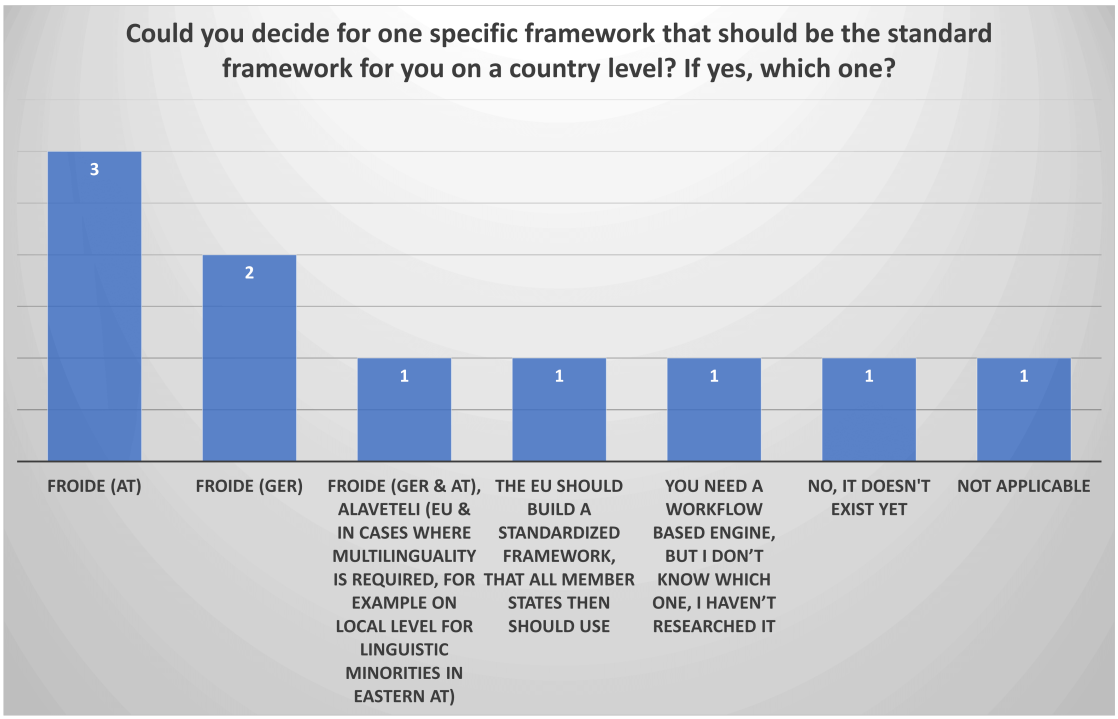

Figure 3.18: Could you decide for one specific framework that should be the standard framework for you on a country level? If yes, which one?

Froide (AT) (3x)

Froide (GER) (2x)

Froide (GER & AT), Alaveteli (EU & in cases where multilinguality is required, for example, on local level for linguistic minorities in eastern AT) (1x)

The EU should build a standardized framework, that all member states then should use (1x)

You need a workflow based engine, but I don't know which ones, I haven't researched it (1x)

No, It doesn't exist yet (1x)

not applicable (1x)

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3.1.17 Do you know https://rti-rating.org?

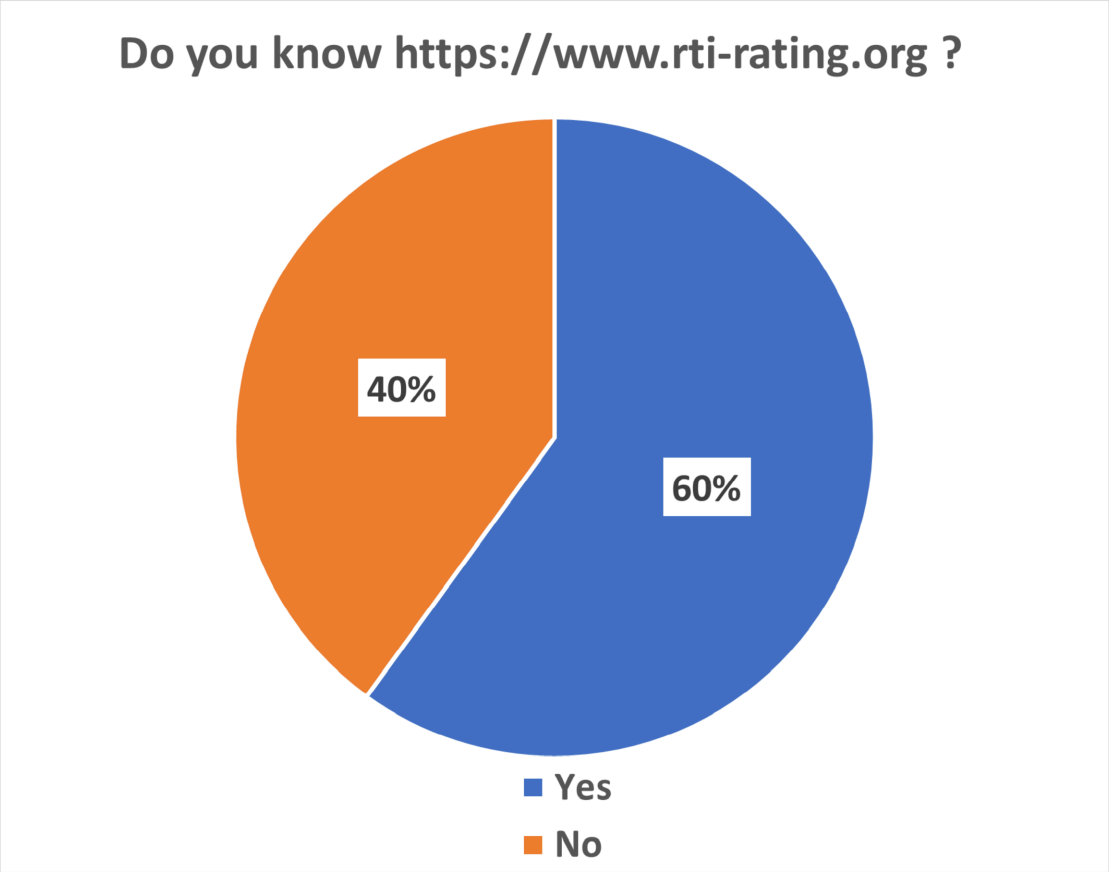

Figure 3.19: Do you know https://rti-rating.org? 4 out of 10 said No, 6 out of 10 said Yes

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3.1.18 If yes, could you rate your overall impression of the information provided there?

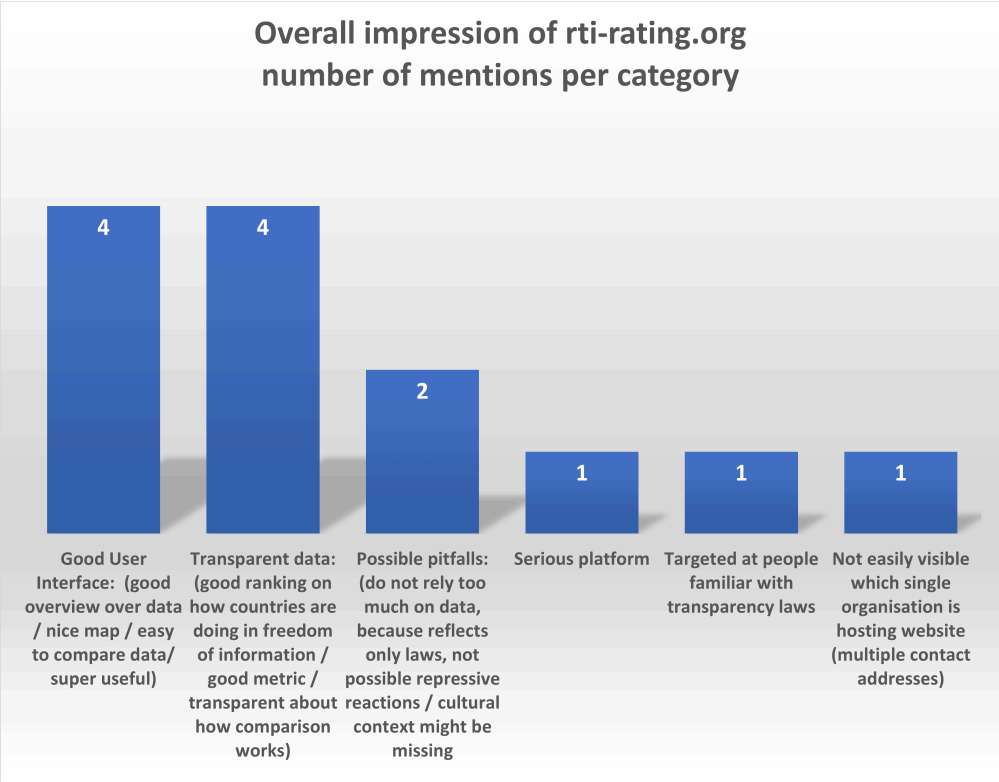

Figure 3.20: If yes could you rate your overall impression of the information provided there? Please feel free to name positive and negative aspects of this website and the information provided.

Good User Interface: (good overview over data / nice map / easy to compare data/ super useful) (4x)

Transparent data: (good ranking on how countries are doing in freedom of information / good metric / transparent about how comparison works) (4x)

possible pitfalls: (do not rely too much on data, because reflects only laws, not possible repressive reactions / cultural context might be missing (2x)

serious platform (1x)

targeted at people familiar with transparency laws (1x)

not easily visible which single organisation is hosting website (multiple contact addresses) (1x)

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3.1.19 Which attributes does a class-leading data framework for transparency have? (based on expert opinion)

By merging the positive answers to the frameworks in use with the negation of the negative aspects of these frameworks we were able to compile a list of attributes a class-leading data framework for transparency has. We have also developed these categories in order to be able to assign the attributes in a well-structured way:

Overall website design and function

- Each request one person posts is visible to all users of the platform, which makes requests transparent (access for one, access for all approach).
- It provides a good overview by having a good search function, also providing statistics, regional comparison and potentially some form of gamification.

Creating a request

- It facilitates request creation by providing legal language and allows to easily switch between different FOI laws (for example environmental information request) and gives good descriptions which of the laws should be used when.
- It has a complete list of authorities to whom transparency laws apply and enables users to easily find them and send requests to them.
- It allows the sending of batch requests to multiple institutions at the same time.

Keeping track

- It helps keeping track of ongoing requests, including visual timelines and reminder functions, including e-mail alerts that your request is overdue and the sending of reminders to authorities.
- It allows other users to join in on requests and get request updates (favorite function).

Accessibility & Privacy

- It provides a redaction tool that allows to remove personal data from requests or answers
- It provides OCR functions for PDFs so that screen readers can read them even if they are redacted.
- The website and all content is optimized for screen readers.

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- The website and all content has built in language support including automated translations.

Appeals

- It contains a mechanism to easily react to denied cases using case law to formulate answers.
- It either provides the possibility to manage court processes within the platform or provides an interface to another platform with this functionality.

One expert mentioned an aspect that would create synergy effects with the framework for freedom of information requests and therefore reduce the need for it or at least reduce the amount of requests drastically:

Additions & Alternatives

- It needs an information freedom database in Austria, where public authorities put in information. You would not have to ask the authorities for the information and could access to information by yourself.

In this case, this freedom of information database obviously needs all the accessibility and privacy features mentioned above, as well as the search function. It could reduce the number of questions directed to officials by proactively providing the information people are looking for, if it integrates well with open frameworks via open interfaces.

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3.1.20 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

Our experts encounter freedom of information laws mainly at work, some deal with it in their leisure time. Two experts who do not use freedom of information laws in their work are journalists and they do not use them because they either get answers without using them or they consider these laws too slow for their everyday journalistic work.

Our interviewees use RTI laws on a state or EU level and their focus is mostly in Europe.

Key Aspects of an RTI law

When being asked on which key aspects they believe have to be part of a RTI law, the most frequently mentioned were that the law should have only a few exceptions, which should also be verifiable by external parties, e.g. a freedom of information commissioner, and that a legal remedy should also be possible without courts of law. Another key point was ease of use of the law and having no deterring regulations. An important point mentioned that would lead to a paradigm shift was: getting information without having to ask for it. An example of a country, which did this shift is Italy and a paper referring to it is linked in 2.1.3 on page 24. Other important points were the response speed and the possible reuse of information.

In our opinion, those points being mentioned reflect the frequently occurring problems interviewees had with the laws they most commonly use. This impression is reinforced by the follow-up question in which we asked which aspects are missing in which region.

Experiences with the Austrian RTI law

When we asked those interview participants who had already worked with it about their experiences with the Austrian Duty to Provide Information Act (Auskunftspflichtgesetz), most of them told us about numerous problems with it. The biggest problem in Austria seems to be the constitutional secrecy of public offices, which public offices like to invoke, but it is just one in a list of problems.

Freedom of Information Frameworks

The FOI frameworks mostly used by our interviewees were asktheeu, fragdenstaat (de+at) and whatdotheyknow.com

Positive aspects of these frameworks include the access for one access for all approach, the ease of use and the good overview, the possibility to make batch requests in the paid variant of asktheeu, the reminder functions and the redaction tool to remove sensitive information before publication.

The negative aspects are mostly feature requests including the demand for a better search function, better OCR (optical character recognition) and the possibility to manage court processes if information gets denied.

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Attributes of a class-leading Data Framework for Transparency

These positive and negative aspects enabled us to compile a set of attributes, that a class-leading data framework for making FOI requests should have. We identified thirteen key aspects (see 3.1.19 on page 64), that we categorised into five categories: "Overall website design and function", "Creating a request", "Keeping track", "Accessibility & Privacy" and "Appeals".

Standard RTI Framework on Country Level

When deciding for a standard framework for their country, the mostly named one was FROIDE, which is the base for fragdenstaat.de and fragdenstaat.at. Also named was Alaveteli, which is used in asktheeu.com, and would also be better suited when local minorities need a multilingual system.

There was also the opinion, that the perfect framework does not exist yet. There was one proposal, that the EU should build a standardized framework, which could then be used in all member states.

Overall in our opinion experts tend to name the frameworks they already used. An info graphic and all experts opinions can be found in Chapter 3.1.16 on page 61.

RTI rating

A majority of interviewees know rti-rating.org, they positively mention the good user interface and the transparent data, but also point to the possible pitfall that only laws are being analysed and not possible repressive reactions or missing cultural context.

We conclude because of the many experts involved in creating it and our experts trust into it, that RTI rating is a reliable source, therefore we use it in our next chapter. We would like to add that our respondents have a very Europe-centred view of the freedom of information issue. This, together with the fact that many of them view the issue of freedom of information from an external perspective, can lead to biases. On the one hand, these biases can affect the knowledge of platforms used outside Europe and, on the other hand, we suspect that people who, for example, have to answer transparency requests as civil servants perceive this activity less positively than people who make such requests in order to expose potential abuses.

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CHAPTER 4

What is a class-leading transparency law?

As mentioned in our research question, we wanted to find out

- Which properties does a class-leading transparency law consist of? (based on the ranking of rti-rating.org)
- Which of those attributes and properties are missing in the current Austrian transparency law and its implementation?

4.0.1 Which properties does a class-leading transparency law consist of

RTI-Rating - rti-rating.org - is a project by Access Info Europe (AIE) - access-info.org and the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) - law-democracy.org. They developed a methodology with 65 indicators to measure the legal framework which different countries have to provide access to information. We're using this website as a main source for this chapter.

The website methodology page[303] explains how the indicators were developed and lists the thirteen experts of the advisory council that were in charge of the development of the indicators and the rating system.

After researchers at CLD and AIE carried out the work of analysing the legal frameworks they sent their assessment to local experts for review and comments. The result was then integrated into the assessment. The website lists 94 local experts from 93 countries. Since there are 135 countries in the rating, we did assume that the list of experts is not complete or that some experts also reviewed other countries. An indication in this

directive is that one of the interviewees told us that he contributed to this review, however no Austrian is listed on the website.

Analyzing the weighted indicators

By analyzing RTI-Ratings Scoring [304] we found that most indicators were weighted with 2 points, but a small selection of indicators were weighted with 4 points, 1 with 8 points and 1 with 10 points. We therefore assumed, that a class-leading transparency law should give special attention to these indicators, when reforming their right to information laws.

We list below all those indicators and highlight those that were weighted more strongly in **bold**. Indicators that we found important due to expert opinions (as mentioned later) have their indicator number <u>underlined</u>:

"

Right of Access

1. The legal framework (including jurisprudence) recognises a fundamental right of access to information.
   Score 0 for no constitutional right to information, 1 point for a limited constitutional right, 2 points for full constitutional recognition of a public right of access to information.
2. The legal framework creates a specific presumption in favour of access to all information held by public authorities, subject only to limited exceptions.
   No=0, Partially=1, Yes=2
3. The legal framework contains a specific statement of principles calling for a broad interpretation of the RTI law. The legal framework emphasises the benefits of the right to information.
   One point for each characteristic.

Scope

4. Everyone (including non-citizens and legal entities) has the right to file requests for information.
   Score 0 point if only residents/citizens; 1 point for all natural persons; 1 point for legal persons.
5. **The right of access applies to all material held by or on behalf of public authorities which is recorded in any format, regardless of who produced it.**
   Score 1-3 points if limited definition of information information such as not "internal documents" or databases excluded, 4 points for all information with no exceptions. ***(max points: 4)***

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6. Requesters have a right to access both information and records/documents (i.e. a right both to ask for information and to apply for specific documents).
Score 1 point for only documents, 1 point for information.

7. The right of access applies to the executive branch with no bodies or classes of information excluded. This includes executive (cabinet) and administration including all ministries, departments, local government, public schools, public health care bodies, the police, the armed forces, security services, and bodies owned or controlled by the above.
Score 4 points for central government agencies covered: 1 for the head of state, 1 for ministries, 1 for other non-statutory agencies created by the ministries, 1 for state and local government if the government is unitary. If it´s a federalist system, 2 points for the non-statutory agencies. This can be determined by examining the length and thoroughness of the list, if such a schedule exists. Score 1 point for the archives. Add three points and deduct 1 for each exempted central agency (such as the armed forces, police, etc). ***(max points: 8)***

8. The right of access applies to the legislature, including both administrative and other information, with no bodies excluded.
Score 1 point if the law only applies to administrative documents, 2-3 points if some bodies excluded, 4 points if all legislative branch at all levels of government ***(max points: 4)***

9. The right of access applies to the judicial branch, including both administrative and other information, with no bodies excluded.
Score 1 point if the law only applies to administrative documents, 2-3 points if some bodies excluded, 4 points if all judicial branch at all levels of government ***(max points: 4)***

10. The right of access applies to State-owned enterprises (commercial entities that are owned or controlled by the State).
Score 1 point if some, 2 points if all

11. The right of access applies to other public authorities, including constitutional, statutory and oversight bodies (such as an election commission or information commission/er).
Score 1 point if some bodies, 2 points if all

12. The right of access applies to a) private bodies that perform a public function and b) private bodies that receive significant public funding.
1 point for public functions, 1 point for public funding

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Requesting Procedures

13. Requesters are not required to provide reasons for their requests.
Y/N answer 0 or 2 points

14. Requesters are only required to provide the details necessary for identifying and delivering the information (i.e. some form of address for delivery).
Score Max 2 points and deduct if requesters are required to give any of the following: ID number, telephone number, residential address, etc.

15. There are clear and relatively simple procedures for making requests. Requests may be submitted by any means of communication, with no requirement to use official forms or to state that the information is being requested under the access to information law.
Max 2 points. Considerations include that there is no requirement to state that the request is under the RTI law, nor to use an official form, nor to identify the document being sought.

16. Public officials are required to provide assistance to help requesters formulate their requests, or to contact and assist requesters where requests that have been made are vague, unduly broad or otherwise need clarification.
Score 1 point for help in formulation and 1 point for clarification procedures

17. Public officials are required to provide assistance to requesters who require it because of special needs, for example, because they are illiterate or disabled.
Score Yes=2 point, No=0

18. Requesters are provided with a receipt or acknowledgement upon lodging a request within a reasonable timeframe, which should not exceed 5 working days.
Score 1 point for receipt, 1 point for max 5 working days

19. Clear and appropriate procedures are in place for situations where the authority to which a request is directed does not have the requested information. This includes an obligation to inform the requester that the information is not held and to refer the requester to another institution or to transfer the request where the public authority knows where the information is held.
Score: 1 point for information not held, 1 for referrals or 2 for transfers

20. Public authorities are required to comply with requesters' preferences regarding how they access information, subject only to clear and limited overrides (e.g. to protect a record).
Score: 2 points for Yes, only 1 point if some limitations

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21. Public authorities are required to respond to requests as soon as possible.
    Score: No=0, Yes=2 points

22. There are clear and reasonable maximum timelines (20 working days or less) for responding to requests, regardless of the manner of satisfying the request (including through publication).
    Score: 1 point for timeframes of 20 working days (or 1 month, 30 days or 4 weeks). Score 2 points for 10 working days (or 15 days, or two weeks) or less.

23. There are clear limits on timeline extensions (20 working days or less), including a requirement that requesters be notified and provided with the reasons for the extension.
    -

24. It is free to file requests.
    Score: No=0, Yes=2 points

25. There are clear rules relating to access fees, which are set centrally, rather than being determined by individual public authorities. These include a requirement that fees be limited to the cost of reproducing and sending the information (so that inspection of documents and electronic copies are free) and that a certain initial number of pages (at least 20) are provided for free.
    Score 1 point for fees being limited to reproduction and delivery costs and set centrally, 1 point for at least 20 pages free of charge or for fees being optional

26. There are fee waivers for impecunious requesters.
    -

27. There are no limitations on or charges for reuse of information received from public bodies, except where a third party (which is not a public authority) holds a legally-protected copyright over the information.
    Score: No=0, Yes=2 points

Exceptions & Refusal

28. **The standards in the RTI Law trump restrictions on information disclosure (secrecy provisions) in other legislation to the extent of any conflict.**
    Score 4 points for a resounding "yes" and 1/2/3 points if only for some classes of information or for some exceptions. If the state secrets law is not trumped by the RTI law max score is 2 points. ***(max points: 4)***

29. **The exceptions to the right of access are consistent with international standards. Permissible exceptions are: national security; international relations; public health and safety; the prevention, investigation and prosecution of legal wrongs; privacy;**

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legitimate commercial and other economic interests; management of the economy; fair administration of justice and legal advice privilege; conservation of the environment; and legitimate policy making and other operations of public authorities.
Score 10 points and then deduct 1 point for each exception which either (a) falls outside of this list and/or (b) is more broadly framed ***(max points: 10)***

30. A harm test applies to all exceptions, so that it is only where disclosure poses a risk of actual harm to a protected interest that it may be refused.
Score 4 points and then deduct 1 point for each exception which is not subject to the harm test ***(max points: 4)***

31. There is a mandatory public interest override so that information must be disclosed where this is in the overall public interest, even if this may harm a protected interest. There are 'hard' overrides (which apply absolutely), for example, for information about human rights, corruption or crimes against humanity.
Consider whether the override is subject to overarching limitations, whether it applies to only some exceptions, and whether it is mandatory. ***(max points: 4)***

32. Information must be released as soon as an exception ceases to apply (for example, after a contract tender process decision has been taken). The law contains a clause stating that exceptions to protect public interests do not apply to information which is over 20 years old.
Score 1 point for each

33. Clear and appropriate procedures are in place for consulting with third parties who provided information which is the subject of a request on a confidential basis. Public authorities shall take into account any objections by third parties when considering requests for information, but third parties do not have veto power over the release of information.
Score: 1 point for consultation, 1 further point if original time frames must be respected and the law allows for expedited appeals.

34. There is a severability clause so that where only part of a record is covered by an exception the remainder must be disclosed.
Score 1 point if yes but sometimes can be refused (eg: if deletions render meaningless the document) and 2 points if partial access must always be granted

35. When refusing to provide access to information, public authorities must a) state the exact legal grounds and reason(s) for the refusal and b) inform the applicant of the relevant appeals procedures.
Score Y/N: 1 point for a and 1 point for b

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Appeals

36. The law offers an internal appeal which is simple, free of charge and completed within clear timelines (20 working days or less).
Score 2 points if the internal appeal fulfills these criteria, 1 point if an appeal is offered that does not fulfill this criteria, 0 for no internal appeals.

37. Requesters have the right to lodge an (external) appeal with an independent administrative oversight body (e.g. an information commission or ombudsman).
1 for partial, 2 for yes

38. The member(s) of the oversight body are appointed in a manner that is protected against political interference and have security of tenure so that they are protected against arbitrary dismissal (procedurally/substantively) once appointed.
Score: 1 point for appointment procedure, 1 point for security of tenure

39. The oversight body reports to and has its budget approved by the parliament, or other effective mechanisms are in place to protect its financial independence.
Score 1 point for reports to parliament, 1 point for budget approved by parliament

40. There are prohibitions on individuals with strong political connections from being appointed to this body and requirements of professional expertise.
Score 1 point for not politically connected, 1 point for professional expertise

41. The independent oversight body has the necessary mandate and power to perform its functions, including to review classified documents and inspect the premises of public bodies.
Score 1 point for reviewing classified documents, 1 point for inspection powers

42. The decisions of the independent oversight body are binding.
Score N=0, Y=2 points

43. In deciding an appeal, the independent oversight body has the power to order appropriate remedies for the requester, including the declassification of information.
1 for partial, 2 for fully

44. Requesters have the right to lodge a judicial appeal.
1 for partially, 2 for fully.

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45. Appeals to the oversight body (where applicable, or to the judiciary if no such body exists) are free of charge and do not require legal assistance.
1 for free, 1 for no lawyer required.

46. The grounds for an external appeal are broad (including not only refusals to provide information but also refusals to provide information in the form requested, administrative silence and other breach of timelines, charging excessive fees, etc.).
Score 1 point for appealing refusals, additional points for appealing other violations. ***(max points: 4)***

47. Clear procedures, including timelines, are in place for dealing with external appeals.
Score 1 point for clear procedures, 1 point for timelines.

48. In the appeal process, the government bears the burden of demonstrating that it did not operate in breach of the rules.
Score Y/N and award 2 points for yes.

49. The external appellate body has the power to impose appropriate structural measures on the public authority (e.g. to conduct more training or to engage in better records management)
1 for partial, 2 for fully.

Sanctions & Protections

50. Sanctions may be imposed on those who wilfully act to undermine the right to information, including through the unauthorised destruction of information.
Score 1 point for sanctions for underming right, 1 point for destruction of documents

51. There is a system for redressing the problem of public authorities which systematically fail to disclose information or underperform (either through imposing sanctions on them or requiring remedial actions of them).
Score 1 point for either remedial action or sanctions, 2 points for both

52. The independent oversight body and its staff are granted legal immunity for acts undertaken in good faith in the exercise or performance of any power, duty or function under the RTI Law. Others are granted similar immunity for the good faith release of information pursuant to the RTI Law.
Score 1 for oversight body, 1 for immunity for others

53. There are legal protections against imposing sanctions on those who, in good faith, release information which discloses wrongdoing (i.e. whistleblowers).
Score 2 for strong protections, 1 for moderate protections

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Promotional Measures

54. Public authorities are required to appoint officials (information officers) or units with dedicated responsibilities for ensuring that they comply with their information disclosure obligations.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

55. A central body, such as an information commission(er) or government department, is given overall responsibility for promoting the right to information.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

56. Public awareness-raising efforts (e.g. producing a guide for the public or introducing RTI awareness into schools) are required to be undertaken by law.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

57. A system is in place whereby minimum standards regarding the management of records are set and applied.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

58. Public authorities are required to create and update lists or registers of the documents in their possession, and to make these public.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

59. Training programs for officials are required to be put in place.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

60. Public authorities are required to report annually on the actions they have taken to implement their disclosure obligations. This includes statistics on requests received and how they were dealt with.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

61. A central body, such as an information commission(er) or government department, has an obligation to present a consolidated report to the legislature on implementation of the law.
Score Y/N, Y=2 points

" [304]

Heavier Indicators: The most heavily weighted indicator is exceptions consistency with international standards (29) - weighted with up to 10 points, followed by right of access to the executive branch (7) with up to 8 points.

The following indicators are all are weighted for up to 4 points: Right to all material (5), right to access in legislature (8), right to access in judicial branch (9), standards in the RTI Law trump restrictions on information disclosure (28), harm test applies to all exceptions(30), mandatory public interest override (31) and broad grounds for an external appeal(46).

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Normal Indicators: All the other indicators have a maximum score of 2 points.

In order to test our assumption, that the heavier weighted indicators are more important in a class-leading transparency law, we downloaded the reports of the current top 10 and bottom countries in the rating of rti-rating.org. The top ten ranked countries on 28 March 2022 are Afghanistan, Mexico, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Slovenia, Albania, Gambia, India, Croatia and Liberia. The bottom 10 Austria, Palau, Liechtenstein, Republic of Belarus, Monaco, Philippines, Tajikistan, East Timor, Benin and Germany.

The results of comparing the heavier and normal indicators in the top and bottom ten countries in the RTI rating is shown in the following lists:

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Top 10 Countries results in heavier weighted indicators:

- Afghanistan - full points in all heavier weighted indicators (46/46) total sum 139/150
- Mexico - 2 points missing in heavier weighted indicators (44/46) total sum 136/150
- Serbia - full points in all heavier weighted indicators (46/46) total sum 135/150
- Sri Lanka - 7 points missing in heavier weighted indicators (39/46) total sum 131/150
- Slovenia - 3 points missing in heavier weighted indicators (43/46) total sum 129/150
- Albania - 1 point missing in heavier weighted indicators (45/46) total sum 127/150
- Gambia - 4 points missing in heavier weighted indicators (42/46) total sum 127/150
- India - 6 points missing in heavier weighted indicators (40/46) total sum 127/150
- Croatia - 1 point missing in heavier weighted indicators (45/46) total sum 126/150
- Liberia - full points in all of heavier weighted indicators (46/46) total sum 124/150

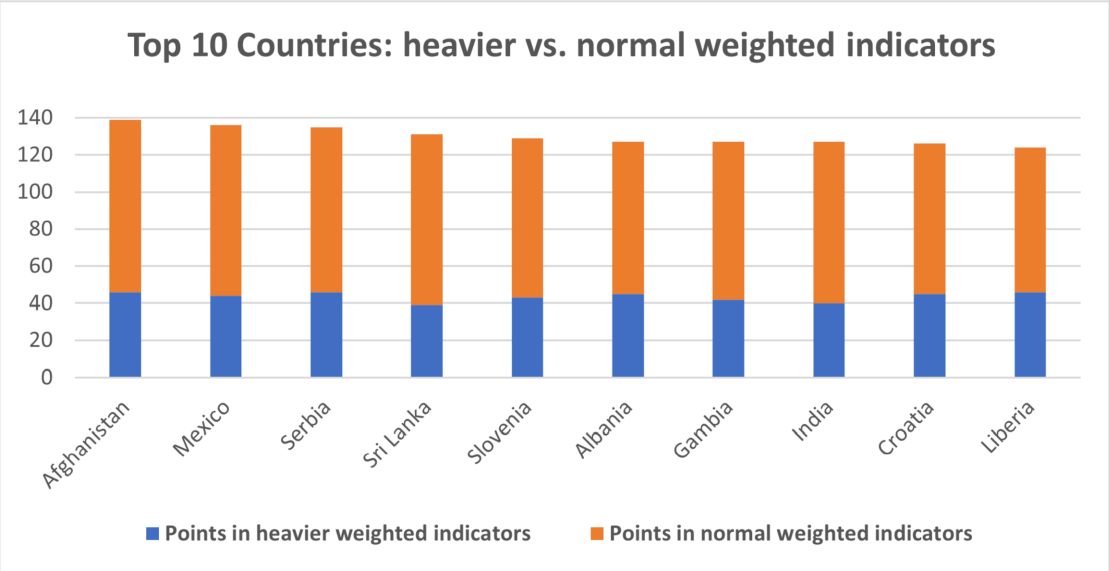

Figure 4.1: Graphs for the Top 10 Countries in RTI Rating, points separated in color blue for the heavier weighted indicators (max. 4-10 points) and orange for the normal indicators (max. 2 points)

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Bottom 10 Countries results in heavier weighted indicators:

- Austria - 11 points in heavier weighted indicators (11/46) total sum 33
- Palau - 19 points in heavier weighted indicators (19/46) total sum 33
- Liechtenstein - 17 points in heavier weighted indicators (17/46) total sum 37
- Republic of Belarus - 20 points in heavier weighted indicators (20/46) total sum 38
- Monaco - 21 points in heavier weighted indicators (21/46) total sum 43
- Philippines - 13 points in heavier weighted indicators (13/46) total sum 46
- Tajikistan - 18 points in heavier weighted indicators (18/46) total sum 49
- East Timor - 22 points in heavier weighted indicators (22/46) total sum 51
- Benin - 18 points in heavier weighted indicators (18/46) total sum 52
- Germany - 19 points in heavier weighted indicators (19/46) total sum 54

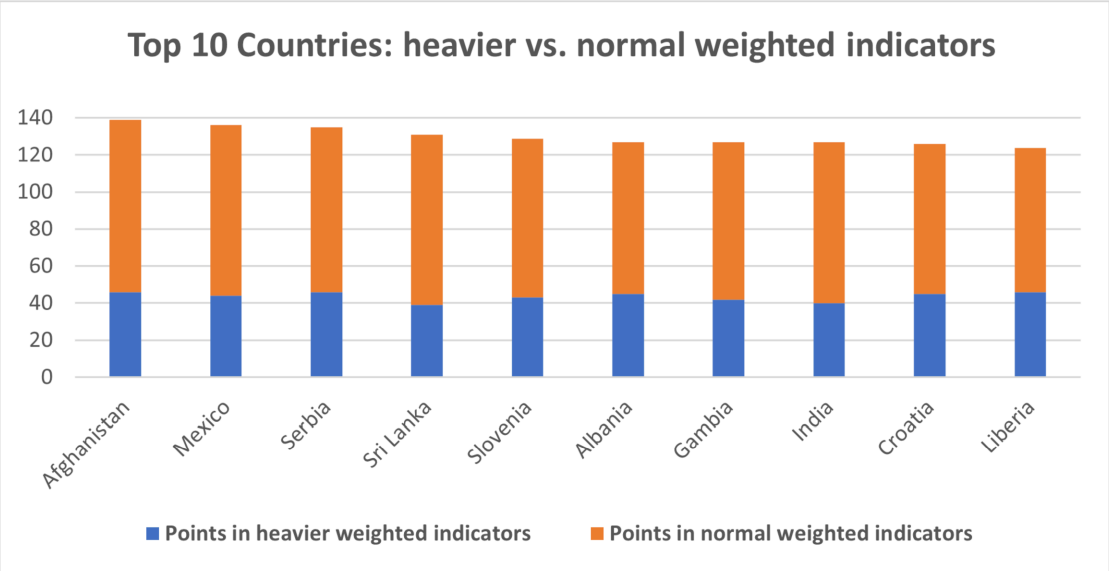

Figure 4.2: Graphs for the Bottom 10 Countries in RTI Rating, points seperated in color blue for the heavier weighted indicators (max. 4-10 points) and orange for the normal indicators (max. 2 points)

We have to remark, that we are aware that the results of Afghanistan are likely to be obsolete by now. We used the results to test our assessment of the indicators, not to make statements about these countries and their current transparency laws.

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Next, we look at the maximum number of points achievable in the heavier weighted indicators compared to the normal weighted indicators.

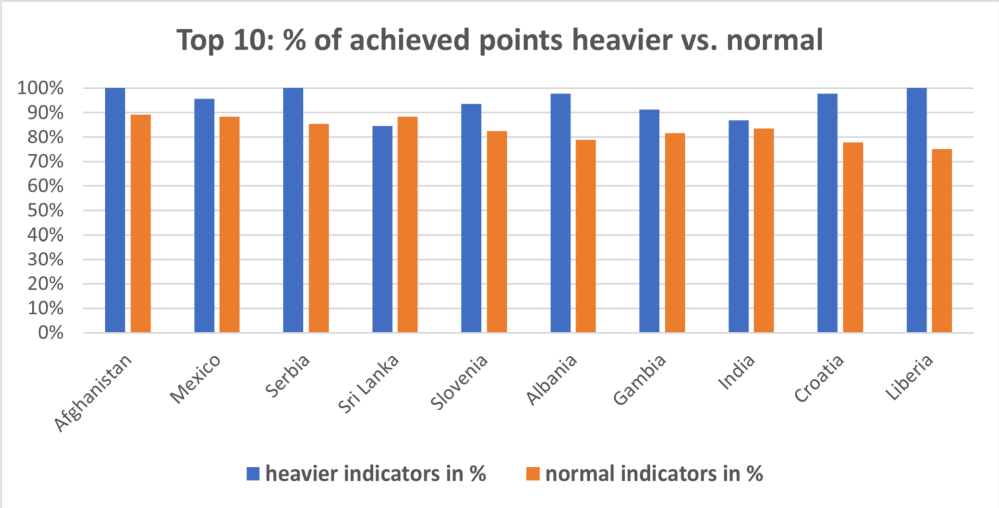

Figure 4.3: Graphs for the Top 10 Countries in RTI Rating. It shows in per centage terms how many of the maximum achievable points were achieved in the heavier (blue) and normal (orange) weighted indicators.

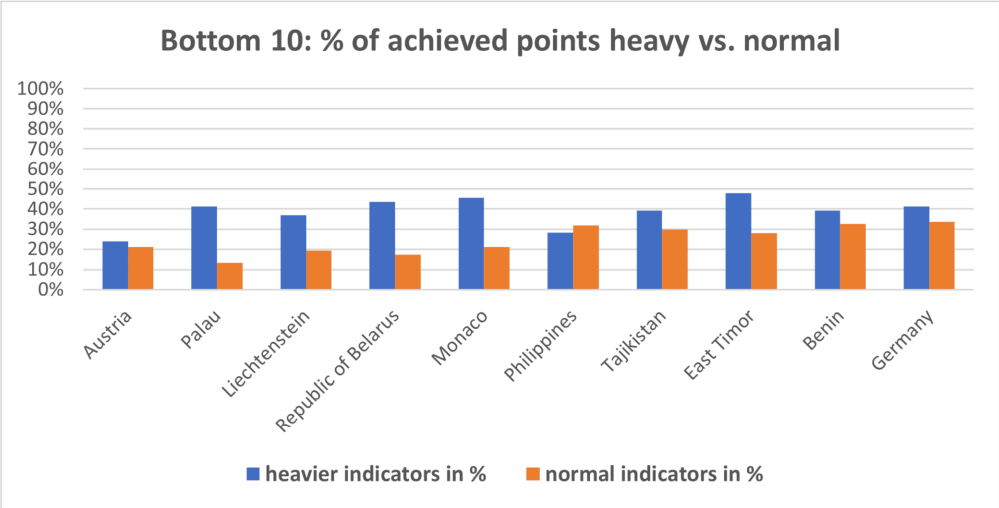

Figure 4.4: Graphs for the Bottom 10 Countries in RTI Rating. It shows in per centage terms how many of the maximum achievable points were achieved in the heavier (blue) and normal (orange) weighted indicators.

Conclusion

It turns out that for both the top 10 countries and the 10 worst countries, in 9 out of 10 cases it is true that, in per centage terms, more points were achieved in the heavier

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weighted indicators than in the normal weighted indicators. Therefore we conclude the importance of those indicators. We assume that they form a subset suitable for conducting a brief analysis of how good a particular FOI law is compared to others.

As RTI-rating itself writes, in their assessment they only look at the laws themselves and do not assess whether the countries actually use these laws in practice as it corresponds to the legal text. So despite a potentially solid legal basis, prosecution could remain a problem.

4.0.2 Adding existing and new indicators by merging with expert opinion

Now that we have established a minimal basis for determining what features a good transparency law should contain, we need to look at the practical aspects. We have already noted several times that RTI-rating refers only to the law and not to actual practice. Now we need to examine the expert opinions (Summary in chapter 3.1.7 on page 45) to see whether they can be linked to already available points in the RTI rating.

Expert Statements during the interviews

"outside review with binding decisions", "redress possible without need to go to court", "having an information officer" - can be linked to indicator **37** in chapter 4.0.1 on page 75, because this indicator measures whether there exists a the right to appeal to an external oversight body or an ombudsman.

"there should be two organisations, one to help the public looking for information and the other one helping the administration in providing information" - can be linked to the aforementioned indicator **37** as well as indicator **54** on page 77 where points are awarded when units exist with dedicated responsibilities for ensuring that they comply with their information disclosure obligations.

"law enforcement should be part of the law, courts that decide if information was rightfully denied out or wrongfully not given out should have access to that information" - can be linked to indicator **41** on page 75, which is fulfilled when an oversight body has the necessary mandate and power to perform its functions, including to review classified documents and inspect the premises of public bodies.

"if an authority doesn't want to give out the information, citizens should be able to go to an ombudsperson and that ombudsperson should ideally also have the right to force the authority to release the information if the ombudsperson thinks that that's the correct thing to do. So in Germany currently they can only say: "Oh, we think that you should publish it for these reasons.", but the final decision is still with the authority and not with the ombudsperson. So ideally, the ombudsperson should have that right" - can be linked to indicator **43** on page 75 which states that "In deciding an appeal, the independent oversight body has the power to order appropriate remedies for the requester, including the declassification of information."

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"not using privacy as general excuse for not giving out data", "there should be few exceptions, state security being one, rather not any others", "It should have very limited exceptions, of course, some exceptions make sense, such as personal data and national security, but with every exception, there should be a balance. So if the information is very relevant and it's really important to make public, exceptions from the exceptions should also be possible", "important things is having limited exceptions are restrictive interpretations of applicable exception", "Everything should be accessible. Everything that is done by the administration, by the public administration, should be accessible if there is no law that something has to stay secret","commitment to access to documents" - can be linked to indicators **2** ("The legal framework creates a specific presumption in favour of access to all information held by public authorities, subject only to limited exceptions."), **5** ("The right of access applies to all material held by or on behalf of public authorities which is recorded in any format, regardless of who produced it."), **6** ("Requesters have a right to access both information and records/documents") on pages 70 - 70 as well as indicators **28** ("The standards in the RTI Law trump restrictions on information disclosure (secrecy provisions) in other legislation to the extent of any conflict."), **29** ("The exceptions to the right of access are consistent with international standards..."), **30**("A harm test applies to all exceptions...") and **31**("There is a mandatory public interest override...") on pages 73 - 74

"commitment to partial access of documents - if part of document needs to stay non public that part should be blacked out instead of not giving out the whole document"- can be linked to indicator **34** on page 74 ("There is a severability clause so that where only part of a record is covered by an exception the remainder must be disclosed.")

"barrier for getting transparency on contracts shouldn't be too high, e.g. 1000 €" **- we did not find a specific indicator fitting to this demand**

"It should cover all public authorities, including things like companies that belong to the state, private companies that entirely belong to the state, that are under the control of the state, including the "Verfassungsschutz" [Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV)] and yeah, just all public authorities" - can be linked to indicators **7**("The right of access applies to the executive branch...."), **8**("...applies to the legislature..."), **9**("...applies to the judicial branch..."), **10**("...applies to State-owned enterprises..."), **11** and **12**("...access applies to a) private bodies that perform a public function...") on page(s) 71 - 71

"it should be easy to get the request right, so that it won't get denied", "easy to use for anyone", - can be linked to indicators **13**("Requesters are not required to provide reasons for their requests."),**14**("Requesters are only required to provide the details necessary for identifying and delivering the information..."),**15**(" There are clear and relatively simple procedures for making requests...."),**16**("Public officials are required to provide assistance to help requesters formulate their requests...") and

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17("Public officials are required to provide assistance to requesters who require it because of special needs...") on page(s) 72-72

"And then there are a couple of more elements, such as access to one, access to many components. So if anyone actually requests some information and it's released to a person, it should be made available to anyone else, without any further procedure" - can be linked to indicator **58**("Public authorities are required to create and update lists or registers of the documents in their possession, and to make these public.") on page 77

"should be easy to manage on both sides" - on the government side training could lead to better management, which would be indicator **59**("Training programs for officials are required to be put in place.") on page 77, making it easier for the public was already mentioned two items above.

"time limits should be shorter."- can be linked to indicator **22**("There are clear and reasonable maximum timelines (20 working days or less) for responding to requests...") on page 73

"hard deadlines in such a law and there should be a two tier approach. First the right to get help from the ombudsperson that exists in a state, and secondly, to call on the courts to enforce freedom of information."- deadlines: can be linked to indicator **22** on page 73, ombudsperson: can be linked to indicator **37** on page 75, court appeal - can be linked to indicator **44**("Requesters have the right to lodge a judicial appeal.") on page 75

" there should be no costs or only low costs for citizens, if answer to request is very long (for example 10,000 pages in print)","simple requests should be free of charge."- can be linked to indicator **25**("There are clear rules relating to access fees...") on page 73

"The right of access to information should always be free. There should be no cost associated with it."- can be linked to indicator **24**("It is free to file requests.") on page 73

"should be a duty for government institutions to make transparent information on a proactive basis, so they should publish the key information about their filing structure and all the information required to enable anyone else to actually file meaningful access to information requests. So it should be possible to obtain a list of all files available from administration before having to actively request them."- can be linked to indicator **58**("Public authorities are required to create and update lists or registers of the documents in their possession, and to make these public.") on page 77

"certain proactive information duties for public bodies like all of the contracts, all of their studies, all of their statistics should be open by default" **- we did not find a specific indicator fitting to this demand**

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”component for reuse, so if information is released to a person after a Freedom of Information request, the person should have the rights to actively disseminate and make public this information without having to fear of any kind of copyright infringement, for example, or violation of state secrets and so on.” **- we did not find a specific indicator fitting to this demand** although there was indicator **27** on page 73 that awards points if there are no limitations on reuse, but with 1 exception ”except where a third party (which is not a public authority) holds a legally-protected copyright over the information.”

Suitability of the expanded indicators

We now merge the list of the heavier indicators with the expert-based indicators and name them **expanded indicators**. We then examine how these expanded indicators (excluding the 3 new ones) perform in per centage terms in the best and worst 10 countries of RTI-rating compared to the rest of the indicators (normal indicators minus the expert-based indicators = rest / non-expanded indicators).

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Top 10 Countries results in expanded indicators:

- Afghanistan - expanded indicators (85/86) non expanded indicators (54/64)
- Mexico - expanded indicators (81/86) non expanded indicators (55/64)
- Serbia - expanded indicators (83/86) non expanded indicators (52/64)
- Sri Lanka - expanded indicators (76/86) non expanded indicators (55/64)
- Slovenia - expanded indicators (79/86) non expanded indicators (50/64)
- Albania - expanded indicators (76/86) non expanded indicators (51/64)
- Gambia - expanded indicators (76/86) non expanded indicators (51/64)
- India - expanded indicators (74/86) non expanded indicators (53/64)
- Croatia - expanded indicators (78/86) non expanded indicators (48/64)
- Liberia - expanded indicators (82/86) non expanded indicators (42/64)

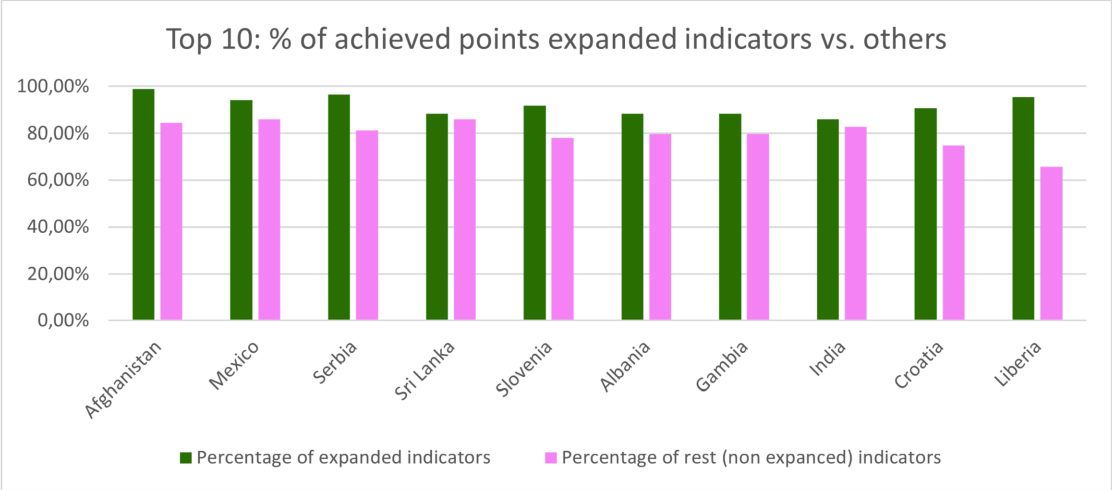

Figure 4.5: Graphs for the Top 10 Countries in RTI Rating. It shows in per centage terms how many of the maximum achievable points were achieved in the expanded (green) and the rest (pink) of the indicators.

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Bottom 10 Countries results in expanded indicators:

- Austria - expanded indicators (38/86) non expanded indicators (16/64)
- Palau - expanded indicators (32/86) non expanded indicators (20/64)
- Liechtenstein - expanded indicators (40/86) non expanded indicators (11/64)
- Republic of Belarus - expanded indicators (33/86) non expanded indicators (16/64)
- Monaco - expanded indicators (27/86) non expanded indicators (19/64)
- Philippines - expanded indicators (30/86) non expanded indicators (13/64)
- Tajikistan - expanded indicators (32/86) non expanded indicators (6/64)
- East Timor - expanded indicators (29/86) non expanded indicators (8/64)
- Benin - expanded indicators (27/86) non expanded indicators (6/64)
- Germany - expanded indicators (21/86) non expanded indicators (12/64)

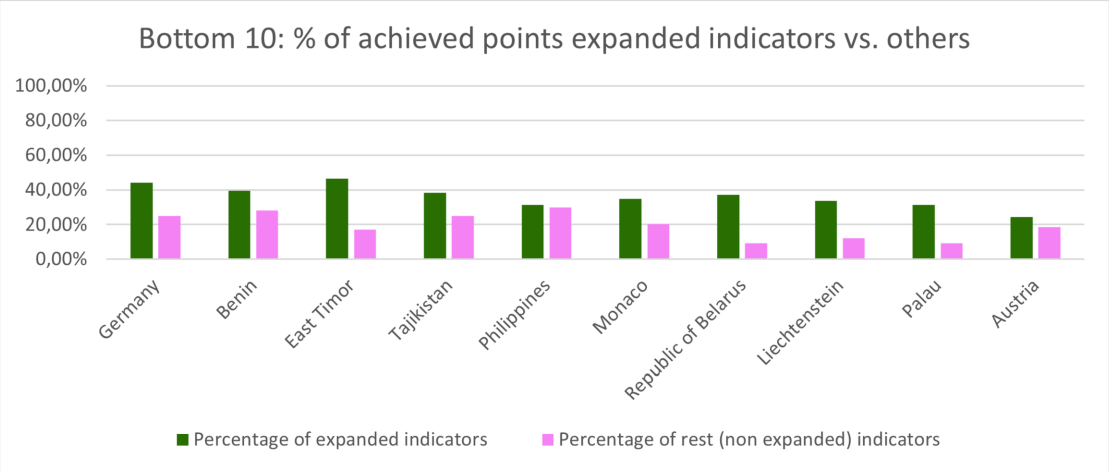

Figure 4.6: Graphs for the Bottom 10 Countries in RTI Rating. It shows in per centage terms how many of the maximum achievable points were achieved in the expanded (green) and the rest (pink) of the indicators.

We have just shown that in all 20 cases, countries score higher in per centage terms on the expanded indicators than on the rest of the indicators. From this we assume that these expanded indicators might be even more suitable to be a chosen subset of indicators for rating transparency laws. We therefore look at all countries all together and compare **heavier and normal indicators** with the **expanded and non-expanded (rest) indicators**.

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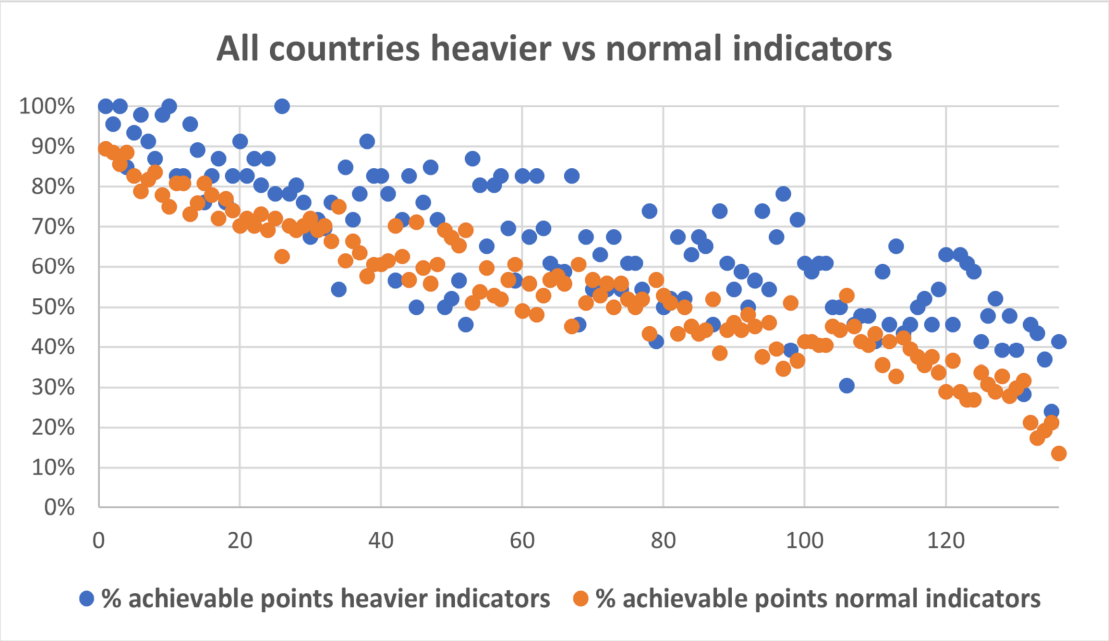

Figure 4.7: Scatter-plot showing all countries on RTI-rating. Indicators are separated in blue (heavier indicators) and orange (normal indicators). The y-axis shows the achieved points of the achievable points in per cent.

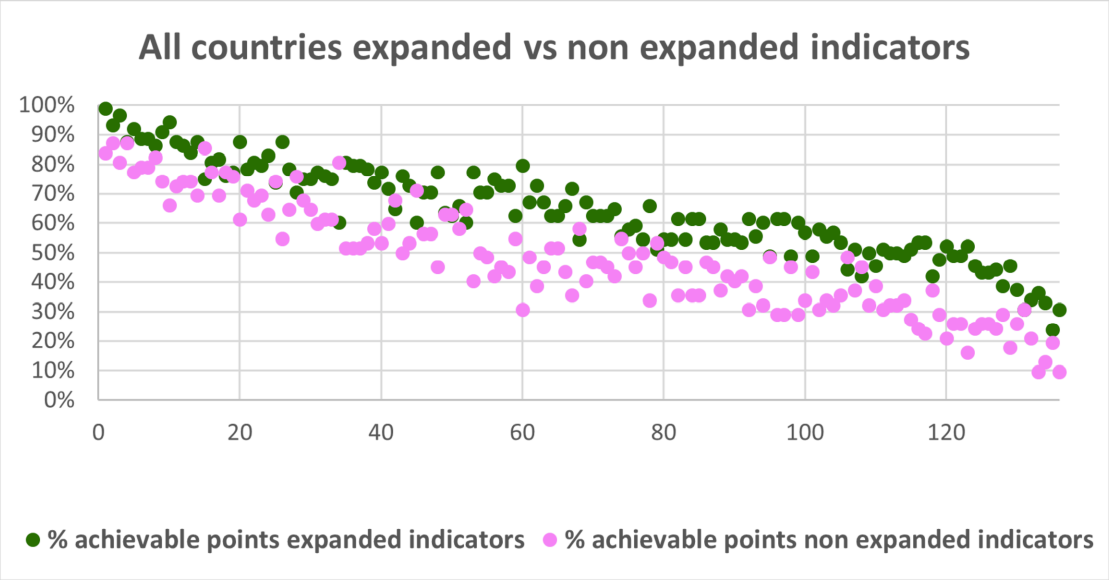

Figure 4.8: Scatter-plot showing all countries on RTI-rating. Indicators are separated in green (expanded indicators) and pink (rest / non expanded indicators). The y-axis shows the achieved points of the achievable points in per cent.

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When comparing both models, countries get more points in the heavier weighted indicators than in the normal indicators in 82,4% of the cases and in the other model countries get more points in the expanded indicators than in the non expanded indicators in 90,4% of the cases.

We therefore conclude that our new model using expanded indicators (and 3 new indicators that we could not test) is a suitable subset of indicators describing an ideal model for state transparency.

4.0.3 Summary & Conclusion

After adding the opinion of our experts, our minimum best effort transparency law with the indicators 5, 7, 8, 9, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 46 ("heavier indicators") increased by 21 RTI and 3 new indicators. We marked all indicators, that were mentioned by our experts during their interview: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 37, 41, 43, 44, 46, 54, 58 and 59 as <u>underlined</u> in chapter 4.0.1 starting on page 70 ("expanded indicators").

There were three additional expert remarks, that we didn't find a cohering indicator for so we formulated them as demands or new indicators:

- "certain proactive information duties for public bodies like all of the contracts, all of their studies, all of their statistics should be open by default"
- "barrier for getting transparency on contracts shouldn't be too high, e.g. 1000 €"
- "component for reuse, so if information is released to a person after a Freedom of In- formation request, the person should have the rights to actively disseminate and make public this information without having to fear of any kind of copyright infringement, for example, or violation of state secrets and so on."

Which properties does a class-leading transparency law consist of?

Based on our calculations and the expert opinion an ideal transparency law does not only (at least) implement the indicators 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 37, 41, 43, 44, 46, 54, 58 and 59, which we marked as <u>underlined</u> in chapter 4.0.1 starting on page 70, but also these three indicators, that we derived by interviewing experts and formulating their demands in a practical way:

- All studies and statistics commissioned by public bodies must be published as standard.
- Public contracts must be published if their value exceeds €1000.
- Governments must allow the re-use, free of charge, of all documents they publish actively or on request. In the event that copyright protection does not permit

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this, it must be required, at least for future works, that new works commissioned from external service providers be published under a free licence (e.g. public domain or CC-BY). Where this is reasonable, the legislator must try to acquire such publication right afterwards.

4.0.4 Which of those attributes and properties are missing in the current Austrian transparency law and its implementation?

Comparison of the previously selected indicators from RTI-Rating[301] with the law in Austria ("Auskunftspflichtgesetz") combined with the three new indicators based on expert opinion.

5 (Ideal):

> **„The right of access applies to all material held by or on behalf of public authorities which is recorded in any format, regardless of who produced it." [301]**

5 (Austria): The current Austrian law on the duty to provide information does not specifically allow to receive documents, but only to get information (in the sense of a summary). Internal documents are generally not covered. Specific documents are often withheld with a reference to the statutory duty of secrecy.

6 (Ideal):

> **„Requesters have a right to access both information and records/documents (i.e. a right both to ask for information and to apply for specific documents)." [301]**

6 (Austria): In the Austrian law it is not foreseen to ask for specific documents of any form, just for information (e.g. the answering of questions)

7 (Ideal):

> **„The right of access applies to the executive branch with no bodies or classes of information excluded. This includes executive (cabinet) and administration including all ministries, departments, local government, public schools, public health care bodies, the police, the armed forces, security services, and bodies owned or controlled by the above." [301]**

7 (Austria): The right to access data should apply to the whole Executive branch with no bodies or classes of information excluded. This is true for the current law as it applies to the Federation as well as all self administered organs.

8 (Ideal):

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„The right of access applies to the legislature, including both administrative and other information, with no bodies excluded.“ [301]

8 (Austria): The law does not apply to the legislature, regional laws also don't cover regional parliaments.

9 (Ideal):

„The right of access applies to the judicial branch, including both administrative and other information, with no bodies excluded.“ [301]

9 (Austria): The law does not apply to the judiciary.

10 (Ideal):

„The right of access applies to State-owned enterprises (commercial entities that are owned or controlled by the State).“ [301]

10 (Austria): This is not the case.

11 (Ideal):

„The right of access applies to other public authorities, including constitutional, statutory and oversight bodies (such as an election commission or information commission/er).“ [301]

11 (Austria): This point is considered as half fulfilled. The law applies to independent state institutions that perform administrative tasks, e.g. the Public Employment Service (AMS). However, some institutions (with compulsory membership, e.g. the Chamber of Labour) only have to provide information to their members, but not to the general public.

12 (Ideal):

„The right of access applies to a) private bodies that perform a public function and b) private bodies that receive significant public funding.“ [301]

12 (Austria): The right of access applies neither to private bodies that perform a public function nor to private bodies that receive significant public funding.

13 (Ideal):

„Requesters are not required to provide reasons for their requests.“ [301]

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13 (Austria): The law does neither mention that requesters are required to provide reasons for their request nor that they are not required to provide those reasons. From our experience they are not required to give those reasons, but providing those reasons can lead to benefits: Being a journalist or a social watchdog can lead to not having to pay fees for expensive information requests. *When re-checking all the indicators on www.rti-rating.org/country-data/by-indicator/13/ we noticed, that although laws in different countries did not require to provide reasons for getting information, points for this indicator were not awarded uniformly. For Example Hungary, the Maldives and other countries did receive 2 points for this indicator, whereas Austria, Bolivia, Benin, Palau and others did not receive points here. Since Austria and Palau have been treated equally and the difference in points between these countries and the next highest ranked is four points, a change at this point would mean no change in the ranking for these last-placed countries. However, other countries could swap places in the ranking if points are awarded uniformly in the future. We did inform RTI rating about this issue.*

14 (Ideal):

> **„Requesters are only required to provide the details necessary for identifying and delivering the information (i.e. some form of address for delivery).“ [301]**

14 (Austria): It's only necessary for written requests to provide an address, because answers usually come sent to this address in paper form, but it is also possible to make requests orally or via telephone. If the content or scope of the information requested is not sufficiently clear from the request, inquiring persons may be asked to make a written request.

15 (Ideal):

> **„There are clear and relatively simple procedures for making requests. Requests may be submitted by any means of communication, with no requirement to use official forms or to state that the information is being requested under the access to information law.“ [301]**

15 (Austria): „§ 2. Anyone is entitled to submit requests for information in writing, orally or by telephone. Any applicant for information may be requested to formulate his oral or telephonic request for information in writing, if the request does not sufficiently substantiate the contents or the extent of the information requested.“ [292]

16 (Ideal):

> **„Public officials are required to provide assistance to help requesters formulate their requests, or to contact and assist re-**

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questers where requests that have been made are vague, unduly broad or otherwise need clarification.“ [301]

16 (Austria): The law does not specify any need to provide assistance to requesters in any way.

17 (Ideal):

> **„Public officials are required to provide assistance to requesters who require it because of special needs, for example because they are illiterate or disabled.“ [301]**

17 (Austria): The law does not specify any need to provide assistance to requesters in any way.

22 (Ideal):

> **„There are clear and reasonable maximum timelines (20 working days or less) for responding to requests, regardless of the manner of satisfying the request (including through publication).“ [301]**

22 (Austria): The information shall be given without delay, at latest within 8 weeks of receipt and in special occasions where a request takes longer the applicant shall be informed about the delay in written form. Our experience (and expert experience) state that public officials use those deadlines to the end and also sometimes take longer to reply than foreseen in the law.

24 (Ideal):

> **„It is free to file requests.“ [301]**

24 (Austria): Filing requests is free. If answering the request would create costs, requesters will receive information about the expected costs for such information. Journalists and so-called social watchdogs are exempt from these costs due to a court ruling.

25 (Ideal):

> **„There are clear rules relating to access fees, which are set centrally, rather than being determined by individual public authorities. These include a requirement that fees be limited to the cost of reproducing and sending the information (so that inspection of documents and electronic copies are free) and that a certain initial number of pages (at least 20) are provided for free.“ [301]**

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25 (Austria): Such rules do not exist. Also access to documents is not granted by law (only information) Making requests is always free, but sometimes getting an answer costs money, but people are generally contacted before costs arise. There is no amount of pages provided for free by law. How this is handled in practice is not very uniform. If a RTI request gets denied, it costs 6.5 € to obtain this rejection in an official form, which is required for the action in court.

27 (Ideal):

> **„There are no limitations on or charges for reuse of information received from public bodies, except where a third party (which is not a public authority) holds a legally-protected copyright over the information.“ [301]**

27 (Austria): There are very detailed limitations on reuse which are written down in the Information Re-use Act (Informationsweiterverwendungsgesetz - IWG) [291]. If people want to reuse certain documents covered by the law, they have to file a request and wait for a couple of weeks until they get sent the information about the costs.

28 (Ideal):

> **„The standards in the RTI Law trump restrictions on information disclosure (secrecy provisions) in other legislation to the extent of any conflict.“ [301]**

28 (Austria): In any case of conflict between the duty to provide information law and the official secrecy, the official secrecy wins.

29 (Ideal):

> **„The exceptions to the right of access are consistent with international standards. Permissible exceptions are: national security; international relations; public health and safety; the prevention, investigation and prosecution of legal wrongs; privacy; legitimate commercial and other economic interests; management of the economy; fair administration of justice and legal advice privilege; conservation of the environment; and legitimate policy making and other operations of public authorities.“ [301]**

29 (Austria): Information should only be given out if it not substantially impairs compliance with the duties of the administration, professional organisations are only required to give out information to their members only to the extent as this does not prevent proper compliance with their statutory duties. Such information shall not be given if it is obviously requested in a frivolous way. In addition article 20(3) of the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law (B-VG) says:

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„(3) All functionaries entrusted with federal, provinces and municipal administrative duties as well as the functionaries of other public law corporate bodies are, save as otherwise provided by law, pledged to confidentiality about all facts of which they have obtained knowledge exclusively from their official activity and which have to be kept confidential in the interest of the maintenance of public peace, order and security, of comprehensive national defence, of external relations, in the interest of a public law corporate body, for the preparation of a ruling or in the preponderant interest of the parties involved (official confidentiality). Official secrecy does not exist for functionaries appointed by a popular representative body if it expressly demands such information.“[290]

30 (Ideal):

> **„A harm test applies to all exceptions, so that it is only where disclosure poses a risk of actual harm to a protected interest that it may be refused.“ [301]**

30 (Austria): In Austrian law, exceptions to the refusal to provide information do not have to undergo a harm test.

31 (Ideal):

> **„There is a mandatory public interest override so that information must be disclosed where this is in the overall public interest, even if this may harm a protected interest. There are hard overrides (which apply absolutely), for example for information about human rights, corruption or crimes against humanity.“ [301]**

31 (Austria): In the Austrian law a mandatory public interest override is not foreseen.

34 (Ideal):

> **„There is a severability clause so that where only part of a record is covered by an exception the remainder must be disclosed.“ [301]**

34 (Austria): There is no such clause, thus requests can be rejected as a whole by referring to the exception.

37 (Ideal):

> **„Requesters have the right to lodge an (external) appeal with an independent administrative oversight body (e.g. an information commission or ombudsman).“ [301]**

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37 (Austria): There is no independent administrative oversight body. There is a general institution called Ombudsman Board (Volksanwaltschaft), but this institution does not have any specific rights on forcing the administration to give out information they rejected before. The Ombudsman Board investigates every complaint and examines whether there is maladministration. However, a complaint does not always lead to an investigation.

41 (Ideal):

> **„The independent oversight body has the necessary mandate and power to perform its functions, including to review classified documents and inspect the premises of public bodies.“ [301]**

41 (Austria): There is no independent oversight body and even courts do not have the right to review or inspect all of the documents before deciding over their publication

> „And in one case, we even found that the court cannot ask for the public body for information and be guaranteed to receive it.“ Chapter 5.1.13 on page 179

43 (Ideal):

> **„In deciding an appeal, the independent oversight body has the power to order appropriate remedies for the requester, including the declassification of information.“ [301]**

43 (Austria): It does not exist, therefore it does not have this power.

44 (Ideal):

> **„Requesters have the right to lodge a judicial appeal.“ [301]**

44 (Austria): Requesters have a right to lodge a judicial appeal as stated in the Duty to Grant Information Act:

> „ § 4. If an information is not granted a decree on the decision shall be issued if the applicant requests so. The rules of procedure determining the issue of the decree so to be rendered shall be subject to be the AVG (General Administration Procedure Act), unless a different procedural act shall apply to the matter, in which the information is requested.“ [292]

46 (Ideal):

> **„The grounds for an external appeal are broad (including not only refusals to provide information but also refusals to provide information in the form requested, administrative silence and other breach of timelines, charging excessive fees, etc.).“ [301]**

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46 (Austria): The legal reasoning of the state body, which must be stated in the official reply in the event of a refusal to provide information, can be challenged before the administrative court.

54 (Ideal):

> **„Public authorities are required to appoint officials (information officers) or units with dedicated responsibilities for ensuring that they comply with their information disclosure obligations.“ [301]**

54 (Austria): There is no equivalent of such a provision in Austrian law.

58 (Ideal):

> **„Public authorities are required to create and update lists or registers of the documents in their possession, and to make these public.“ [301]**

58 (Austria): There is no equivalent of such a provision in Austrian law.

59 (Ideal):

> **„Training programs for officials are required to be put in place. “ [301]**

59 (Austria): There is no equivalent of such a provision in Austrian law.

New indicator based on Expert Opinion 1 (Ideal):
All studies and statistics commissioned by public bodies must be published as standard.

New indicator based on Expert Opinion 1 (Austria): There is no equivalent of such a provision in Austrian law.

New indicator based on Expert Opinion 2 (Ideal):
Public contracts must be published if their value exceeds €1000.

New indicator based on Expert Opinion 2 (Austria): There is no equivalent of such a provision in Austrian law.

New indicator based on Expert Opinion 3 (Ideal):
Governments must allow the re-use, free of charge, of all documents they publish actively or on request. In the event that copyright protection does not permit this, it must be required, at least for future works, that new works commissioned from external service providers be published under a free licence (e.g. public domain or CC-BY). Where this is reasonable, the legislator must try to acquire such publication rights afterwards.

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New indicator based on Expert Opinion 3 (Austria): There is no equivalent of such a provision in Austrian law.

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4.0.5 Summary: Which properties, that a class-leading transparency law consists of is Austria lacking?

The Austrian Duty to Grant Information Act (Auskunftspflichtgesetz) lacks the right to retrieve internal documents, it also just allows to demand for information, not any specific documents. It applies to the Federation as well as all self administered organs, but not to the judicial branch. Legislature is not covered by the law. The law also does not apply to state-owned enterprises. It does however apply to other public authorities, including constitutional, statutory and oversight bodies. In some cases the right to information is only granted to members of these organisations. The right of access applies neither to private bodies that perform a public function nor to private bodies that receive significant public funding.

The law does not require officials to provide assistance to requesters formulating the request or to contact them if they are vague or partly unclear. No assistance is provided to requesters who require it because of special needs, for example because they are illiterate or disabled. The maximum timeline for responding to requests does not follow international standards (8 weeks instead of 20 working days or less) and is not enforceable.

There's neither a ruleset for access fees for documents nor even a right to receive documents. Officials can determine if there is a cost to responding, but usually provide this information in advance. There is no standard requirement for a certain number of free printed pages. There are no limitations on or charges for reuse of information received from public bodies.

When conflicts arise between the law on the obligation to provide information and official secrecy, official secrecy currently wins, which ideally should be the opposite, because in a constitutional state the administration should be accountable. Ideally also the exceptions to the right of access should adhere to international standards, which is not the case. Austrian laws allow the administration to argue that providing information would be too much of a burden. The secrecy provision can only be revised by legal action. Neither a harm test nor a mandatory public interest override are foreseen in the Austrian law; both are considered international best practice.

There is no severability clause so that where only part of a record is covered by an exception the remainder must be disclosed. There are no independent oversight bodies, that could declassify information. The grounds for an external appeal should be broad (including refusal to provide information in the form requested, breach of timelines excessive fees, etc.), but that is these grounds are not very broad in Austria. However, it is possible to challenge the refusal to provide information before the administrative court. This requires a chargeable decision in which the public authority that has refused (partial) information states its legal arguments.

Public authorities are not required to appoint persons with dedicated responsibilities for ensuring that they comply with their information disclosure obligations. Public authorities are not required to create and update lists or registers of the documents in

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their possession, and to make these public. There are no training programs for officials required to be put in place.

There is no law for mandatory publication of studies and statistics paid for by taxpayers' money. Additionally no law exists forcing a mandatory publication of contracts if their value exceeds 1000€. And finally no legislation exists allowing the re-use, free of charge, of all documents published actively or on request.

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4.1 Final summary

In this thesis we were able to answer our research questions:

- Which attributes does a class-leading data framework for transparency have?
  - Answered in chapter 3.1.19 on page 64
- Which properties does a class-leading transparency law consist of?
  - We listed the properties in chapter 4.0.3 on page 89.
- Which of those attributes and properties are missing in the current Austrian transparency law and its implementation?
  - A list of missing attributes and properties can be found in 4.0.4 on page 90.
  - We also provide a summary in chapter 4.0.4 on page 99
- Which data framework would experts in Austria (and the EU) rate highest for use in providing state transparency?
  - Is dealt with in chapter 3.1.20 on page 67

During our research, we found that when comparing an indicator on RTI-Rating.org, the rating was not consistent, which we reported to them to make their work even more accurate in the future (see chapter 4.0.4 on page 92).

As part of our work, we also considered evaluating the draft of a new Freedom of Information Act in Austria[254], but we decided against it for several reasons. On the one hand, the Forum for Freedom of Information has already made a good basic assessment of this draft law[111]. Moreover, the law has not yet been finalised and has not yet been introduced as a government bill in the National Council. In regard to Austria's history and its efforts to write a new transparency law that have come to nothing, it would not be surprising if this law were not passed either. The same thing happened with a transparency law that was introduced in the National Council in December 2014 and was postponed in the Constitutional Committee in October 2016 and was never taken up again[281].

It remains to be seen whether Austria will have a law in the foreseeable future that will satisfy the information needs of an active participatory democracy in the internet age.

We would like to point out once again that our work may contain biases due to the selection of experts (all from Europe, only one works for the state) and due to the restriction of the literature search to papers available at TU Wien. Further research is needed to confirm, refute or complement our findings, but we have tried very hard to make our research as transparent as possible so that others can build on it.

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CHAPTER 5

Appendix

5.1 Interviews

Here we start with the preliminary Interview and its English translation followed by the expert interviews and their English translation (if they were in German).

5.1.1 Preliminary Interview - Original

Datum des Interviews: Freitag 25.9.2020 – 17:30
Medium: Online Interview über Videochat, Aufzeichnung mittels Audio Recorder
Transkript gekürzt um Begrüßung, Verabschiedung und Unterbrechung durch Hubschrauber, äh-Geräusche wurden nicht Transkribiert
Gegengelesen und korrigiert am 9.12.2020
Freigabe für Verwendung am 15.12.2020

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (im Transkript fett markiert)

Interviewte Person: Mathias Huter, Transparenz- und Anti-Korruptionsaktivist

Generalsekretär des Forum Informationsfreiheit (`https://www.informationsfreiheit.at`), Managing Director of the **UNCAC** Coalition (`https://uncaccoalition.org`)

Wozu braucht es Transparenz oder welche positiven oder negativen Auswirkungen hat Transparenz, also im Hinblick auf staatliche Transparenz?

Das kommt immer auf den Kontext an, ich glaube grundsätzlich ermöglicht Transparenz einerseits Kontrolle durch die Öffentlichkeit – Nachvollziehbarkeit, etwa wie von wem welche Entscheidungen getroffen werden, was mit Steuergeldern passiert und andererseits ermöglicht Transparenz auch ein Einbringen oder Mitbestimmen, etwa wenn es um Begutachtungsprozesse geht, um laufende Verfahren, Umweltverfahren oder offene

Mitentscheidungsprozesse. Das sind zumindest einmal zwei große Komponenten. Transparenz schafft die Möglichkeit bzw. ist eigentlich Bedingung für eine Mitbestimmung der Öffentlichkeit, für ein Einbringen der Bürgerinnen und Bürger, aber auch für Kontrolle.

Wie ist denn der Status Quo in Österreich und was hat sich in den letzten Jahren verbessert oder verschlechtert?

Die Gesetze sind im Wesentlichen gleich geblieben, es gibt Erkenntnisse österreichischer Gerichte und Urteile des europäischen Gerichtshofs für Menschenrechte, die quasi eine Grundlage für mehr Transparenz bieten könnten, aber die in der Umsetzung oder in der Art und Weise wie Transparenz bei uns gelebt wird in der Praxis eigentlich nicht viel geändert haben bislang. Es gibt auf europäischer Ebene verschiedene Vorgaben, die Österreich umsetzen muss oder umgesetzt hat. Da gab‘s dann in speziellen Aspekten mehr Transparenz. Es gibt einerseits die Public Sector Information Directive, in Österreich umgesetzt durch das Informationsweiterverwendungsgesetz, das unter der österreichischen Ratspräsidentschaft reformiert bzw. weiterentwickelt wurde. Das bietet keine Rechtsgrundlage um mehr Informationen zu bekommen, sondern das regelt, was mit Informationen gemacht werden darf, mit Datensätzen und Dokumenten, die von der öffentlichen Hand bereits veröffentlicht wurden.

Allerdings gibt’s da auf europäischer Ebene im Moment einen Prozess, wo von der EU-Kommission sogenannte high value datasets identifiziert werden, die dann, sobald die bestimmt sind, in ganz Europa frei zugänglich gemacht werden sollen. Was das genau sein wird ist noch nicht ganz klar, aber das sind eben in erster Linie Datensätze die einen hohen wirtschaftlichen Wert haben, die aber gleichzeitig, das schließt sich nicht aus, auch einen hohen demokratiepolitischen Wert haben könnten oder was öffentliche Kontrolle angeht einen großen Mehrwert haben könnten. Oder eben auch, das ist auch ein Aspekt vielleicht, den Transparenz bewirken kann, die bestmögliche Nutzung von Wissen, das bereits bezahlt und erschaffen wurde, dass eben das von allen möglichen Interessensgruppen & -akteuren weiterverwendet werden kann. Also so viel zur europäischer Ebene.

Nachdem meinen Background ja vor allem auch Korruptionsbekämpfung ist gibt es hier noch Spezialthemen, wie zum Beispiel das Register der wirtschaftlichen Eigentümer, das gemäß der 5. EU-Geldwäscherichtlinie jetzt öffentlich zugänglich sein muss. In Österreich gibt’s da leider eine Bezahlschranke, aber es gibt, wenn man 3 € zahlt einen Zugang zu diesem Register. Da stehen quasi die Personen drin, die hinter Firmennetzwerken oder hinter juristischen Personen stehen. Also nicht wer die direkten Eigentümer eines Unternehmens sind, sondern wer am Ende einer Kette von Eigentümern steht.

Es gibt jetzt zum Beispiel Daten zu Auftragsvergaben der öffentlichen Hand über 50 000 € , die wir auf https://offenevergaben.at aufbereiten. Das wird als Open Data gemäß Bundesvergabegesetz 2018 veröffentlicht, ist auch im Zuge von EU- sozusagen Standards eingeführt worden. Oft kommt dort wo’s ein bisschen mehr Transparenz gibt diese auf Anregung oder Verpflichtung der EU zustande. Aber man sieht dann zum Beispiel die Covid-19 Hilfsfonds, die völlig untransparent sind. Wer hier welche Förderungen oder Gelder bezieht ist in keinster Weise nachvollziehbar.

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Gleichzeitig ist es aber bei der EU so, dass jedes Mal, wenn EU-Gelder irgendwo verwendet werden, die Empfänger veröffentlicht werden müssen. An diesem Beispiel sieht man auch immer die Unterschiedlichen Transparenzzugänge zwischen europäischen Geldern und österreichischen Geldern.

In gewissen Bereichen hat es sogar Rückschritte gegeben, wenn man sich etwa die Transparenzdatenbank und das Transparenzdatenbankgesetz ansieht. Hier wurden zum Beispiel Sanktionen erhöht, die darauf stehen, wenn man Daten aus der Transparenzdatenbank, die ja eh schon geheim sind, weiterverarbeitet. Da wurden zum Beispiel die Verwaltungsstrafen massiv erhöht. Diese Verwaltungsstrafen werden dann verhängt, wenn solche Daten weiterverwendet werden, die weder unter das Datenschutzgesetz fallen, noch unter das . Also hier gibt's trotzdem die Strafe, obwohl verarbeitete Daten eigentlich nicht sensibel wären.

Wie viel Transparenz braucht es eigentlich?

Sehr viel, eigentlich sollte es immer dort wo's um die Verwendung öffentlicher Mittel geht, wo es aber gleichzeitig nicht um Rechtsansprüche geht, abseits von Pensionszahlung oder Sozialhilfen, immer dort wo sozusagen ein politischer Entscheidungsspielraum ist sollte es meiner Ansicht nach ein Mindestmaß an Transparenz und Nachvollziehbarkeit geben.

Und es sind immer legitime Geheimhaltungsinteressen mit dem öffentlichen Interesse abzuwiegen. Es müssten hier – nach einem modernen Informationsfreiheitsgesetz – 2 Tests angewendet werden. Zuerst müssen Geheimhaltungsgründe in einem Gesetz klar definiert sein. Dann müssten diese Geheimhaltungsgründe nach der Rechtsprechung des europäischen Menschenrechtsgerichtshof in einer Demokratie notwendig und verhältnismäßig sein. Und dann müsste man im speziellen Fall schauen, ob eine Information grundsätzlich unter einen Geheimhaltungsgrund fällt. Wenn das mit ja zu beantworten ist müssten zwei Tests angewandt werden.

Zuerst eine Harm-Test, wo man schaut: Würde wirklich nach diesem Geheimhaltung bei der Herausgabe dieser Informationen ein konkreter und nachvollziehbarer Schaden entstehen. Und wenn das mit ja zu beantworten ist, dann müsste man noch den public interest Test machen, wo man schaut: Okay also es entsteht ein Schaden, aber gibt es hier ein öffentliches Interesse, das höher zu bewerten ist?

Das heißt, wenn es beispielsweise um große Korruptionsanschuldigungen gegen einen hochrangigen Politiker geht. Der wird aufgefordert seinen privaten Kalender offen zu legen. Da könnte man vielleicht argumentieren das verstößt gegen die legitimen Geheimhaltungs- oder Privatsphäreninteressen des betroffenen Politikers. Aber gleichzeitig könnte es sein, dass einfach das öffentliche Interesse an der Aufklärung deutlich dieses Geheimhaltungsinteresse überwiegt und deswegen auf Transparenz zu entscheiden wäre.

Also es braucht viel Transparenz, aber es gibt natürlich auch einfach Bereiche, wo man legitim argumentieren kann, dass es kein öffentliches Interesse gibt. Einfach wenn Informationen nur die Bürger betreffen könnten, aber es nicht um eine besondere Verwen-

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dung öffentlicher Gelder geht oder bestimmte Entscheidungen einer Behörde oder eines gewählten Vertreters.

Könnte man das Festmachen an gewissen Geldhöhen beispielsweise? Sozialhilfe ist ja eine Sache, wo für mich ein legitimes Interesse für die Wahrung des Datenschutzes der betroffenen Person erscheint. Es gab dann auch ein Gerichtsurteil bezüglich Bauernförderungen, also kann man das irgendwo an einem Geldbetrag oder an einer Ermessenshöhe festmachen, ab wann etwas geheim bleiben sollte und nicht veröffentlicht werden sollte, zumindest nicht namentlich veröffentlich werden sollte?

Also man könnte einerseits sagen, dass Rechtsansprüche nicht unbedingt zu veröffentlichen sind. Also wenn ich einen Rechtsanspruch auf Arbeitslosengeld, auf Sozialhilfe oder Pensionszahlungen habe, dann gibt's keinen politischen Entscheidungsspielraum.

Bei der Agrarförderung ist der Sonderfall, dass es um juristische Personen geht, die auch gleichzeitig natürliche Person sind, weil ein Bauernhof ein wirtschaftliches Unternehmen ist, aber gleichzeitig oft keine GmbH ist, sondern der Landwirt/die Landwirtin selbst auch der Betrieb sind. Grundsätzlich würde ich bei Sozialleistungen, insbesondere dort wo es einen Rechtsanspruch gibt das öffentliche Interesse nicht erhöht sehen. Also da braucht es glaub ich keine unbedingte Nachvollziehbarkeit, sondern da gibt es sehr legitime Geheimhaltungsinteressen. Überall dort wo's um juristische Personen geht, die nicht gleichzeitig natürliche Person sind, sehe ich eigentlich das öffentliche Interesse in der Regel als überwiegend. Also immer wenn's darum geht: Hat ein Verein, hat eine Organisation, hat ein Unternehmen Gelder bekommen, eine Zulassung bekommen, usw. würde ich in der Regel keine Geheimhaltungsinteressen sehen, sondern eigentlich sollte es da so sein, dass wenn man Gelder oder Leistungen als juristische Person vom Staat in Anspruch nimmt, dass man da auch dieser Nachvollziehbarkeit explizit oder implizit zustimmt.

Welche EU-Länder oder welche anderen Länder sind Vorbilder bei Transparenz und warum ist das der Fall?

Das kommt ganz auf den Bereich an, das kann man nicht so ganz Verallgemeinern. England ist beispielsweise sehr gut darin, wenn's um die Offenlegung von Firmenbüchern und den gratis Zugang zu online Daten geht, z.B.: wem gehören Unternehmen, wer sind die Endeigentümer, die wirtschaftlichen Eigentümer von Unternehmen und so weiter.

Die Slowakei hat eine sehr gute Policy, nämlich die verpflichtende Veröffentlichungen von Verträgen der öffentlichen Hand, in der Regel als Volltextdokument. Der Open Data Aspekt ist da leider nicht immer sehr ausgeprägt. Dokumente müssen für alle einsehbar im Internet stehen, sonst sind die Verträge nicht rechtskräftig oder rechtsgültig. Normalerweise gibt es hier eine Barriere von 1000 € an Vertragswert und das betrifft nahezu alle Auftragsvergaben. Es einige Ausnahmen etwa für die Miete von Gräbern oder für standardisierte Arbeitsverträge der öffentlichen Hand, aber ansonsten gilt das für Auftragsvergaben, für Privatisierungen, für Lizenzen, für Genehmigungen, für Public-Private Partnerships, für Mietverträge, für Förderungen und so weiter.

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Also immer wenn ein Vertrag zwischen einem Privaten und der öffentlichen Hand zustande kommt, muss der veröffentlicht werden. Das gibt es dort seit ungefähr zehn Jahren und es hat sich als sehr effektives Antikorruptionstool erwiesen, weil eben beide Partner das Interesse haben, dass der Vertrag in Kraft tritt, dass eine Zahlung zum Beispiel geleistet werden kann und dass eben das im Internet einsehbar ist.

Was das Informationsfreiheitsgesetz angeht ist Slowenien sehr gut, auch weil sie einen sehr gut ausgestalteten Informationsfreiheitsbeauftragten haben, der/die sehr weitreichende Kompetenzen hat.

Es gibt in Deutschland etwa Hamburg mit einem recht soliden Gesetz. Und in manchen Ländern gibt's auch Städte, die sehr innovative Herangehensweisen haben. Also es gibt in verschiedenen Bereichen verschiedene good practice approaches. Und das Slowakische Modell mit den Verträgen haben schon einige andere Länder übernommen, meines Wissens nach Tschechien, Hamburg, Nordmazedonien und Serbien, das macht sozusagen Schule.

RTI-Rating.org kennst du wahrscheinlich (Right to Information Rating), die haben ja Österreich auf den letzten Platz bewertet mit dem letzten Update 2016, würdest du mit der Meinung übereinstimmen, dass sich Österreich Transparenzmäßig am letzten Platz befindet?

Also hierzu die Full Disclosure, dass ich das gereviewed, bzw. das Update gemacht habe.

Ah okay, gut, weil du stehst nicht gelistet da als Experte glaube ich.

Ich weiß es garnicht. Ähm, also ich habe nicht das Erstassessment gemacht, das habe ich nur gereviewed und ein bisschen korrigiert. Es ist so, dass dieses Rating nur das Gesetz selbst bewertet, nicht seine Anwendung und Umsetzung, deswegen ist auch Afghanistan derzeit auf Platz 1, weil die einfach das beste Gesetz auf dem Papier haben, wobei die Praxis wahrscheinlich eine andere Geschichte ist.

Österreich ist das einzige Land der Europäischen Union und die letzte größere Demokratie Europas, die den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern kein Recht auf Zugang zu staatlichen Dokumenten einräumt.

Und wir haben einfach das schlechteste Informationsfreiheitsgesetz, wir haben kein Informationsfreiheitsgesetz, wir haben die schlechteste Auskunftsregelung oder die schlechteste rechtliche Regelung um irgendwie Auskünfte von der öffentlichen Hand zu bekommen unter diesen knapp 130 Ländern eben. Es kann schon sein, dass es punktuell die Verwaltung etwas besser funktioniert, als in manchen der 129 anderen Ländern und gewisse Informationen vielleicht einfacher zu bekommen sind als in anderen Ländern, aber im Großen und Ganzen fehlt eben der Rechtsanspruch und die Durchsetzungsmöglichkeit, insbesondere dann wenn's um politisch sensible Fragen geht oder um Dokumente gibt's eben in der Praxis nicht die Möglichkeit diese zu bekommen und deswegen verdient Österreich schon diesen sehr schlechten Platz in diesem Rating.

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Wie siehst du Transparenz im Hinblick auf Wettbewerbsverzerrung und wäre es da wünschenswert auf EU-Ebene durch eine Richtlinie ein harmonisiertes Auskunftsrecht zu haben?

Ich wüsste von keinen wettbewerbsverzerrenden Effekten die nachgewiesen wurde durch Transparenz...

Also durch fehlende Transparenz

Achso durch fehlende Transparenz. Das kann ich jetzt rechtlich nicht so ganz bewerten. Auftragsvergaben beispielsweise und Wettbewerbsregelungen sind ja auf europäischer Ebene geregelt und standardisiert, da gibt's Mindeststandards und eigene Informationszugangsregeln sozusagen, Informationspflichten durch die Behörden. Natürlich bietet eine fehlende Informationsfreiheit in Österreich einen Wettbewerbsnachteil, wenn man etwa Recherchen europäischer oder der österreichischen öffentlichen Hand haben will, Studien oder Gutachten oder Daten usw. Aber bislang hat sich die EU-Kommission kein Mandat für diesen Bereich genommen, andererseits im Umweltbereich wo's dieses Mandat auf Basis der Aarhus-Konvention durch das Umweltinformationsgesetz schon gibt, also hier gibt's eben höhere Mindeststandards. Mehr Transparenz wäre natürlich schon politisch wünschenswert, ob es jetzt wirklich auf Basis von Wettbewerbsnachteilen möglich ist weiß ich nicht.

Du hast Open-Data angesprochen. Wie sieht in Österreich der Status aus? Mit Open-Data gibt's da eine zentrale Plattform die Daten als Open Data bereitstellt und ist sie zuverlässig?

Es gibt data.gv.at, das vom Bundesrechenzentrum betrieben wird. Es gibt sozusagen eine Gruppe von Open Data Entscheidern oder Promotern der öffentlichen Hand, aber es gibt keine zentrale Stelle, die hier politisch tätig würde. Also es gibt ein Gremium, dass das Thema auf freiwilliger Basis vorantreibt , und das sind Verwaltungsvertreterinnen und Vertreter die da sehr engagiert sind . Was aber fehlt ist eine Stelle mit einem politischen Mandat und vor allem mit den Ressourcen um das Thema weiter vorzutreiben. Es gibt auch keine starke gesetzliche Basis, es gibt in manchen Gesetzen Open Data Aspekte, eben beim Bundesvergabegesetz zum Beispiel, aber deswegen wär's eben wünschenswert, dass Österreich etwa der Open Government Partnership beitritt und damit aber auch im Bund eine klare Zuständigkeit definieren würde, ein kleines Team hätte, das wirklich für Open Government und Open Data zuständig wäre und das ist bislang nicht der Fall. Es gab früher mal im Bundeskanzleramt jemanden, der zuständig war, aber ich bin mir nicht sicher ob's diese Stelle noch gibt.

Wer ist Teil der Open Government Partnership?

Die Open Government Partnership ist defacto eine internationale Organisation, die vor zehn Jahren auf Initiative von privaten Stiftungen, aber auch der Obama Administration, Brasiliens und Frankreichs und noch ein paar weiteren gegründet wurde. Sie hat mittlerweile knapp 80 Länder als Mitgliedsländer, Österreich ist eines der wenigen europäischen Länder, die da nicht dabei sind. Es ist ein Mechanismus sozusagen, unter

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dem Verwaltungen und Zivilgesellschaft zusammen kommt, auf nationaler Ebene Aktionspläne oder Ziele definiert, wie die Demokratie und Transparenz durch Technologie gestärkt werden können, dann werden Aktionspläne zwischen Verwaltung und Politik und Zivilgesellschaft ausgearbeitet für einen Staat. Die werden dann innerhalb von zwei Jahren abgearbeitet oder sollen abgearbeitet werden. Dann gibt es einen Review- und Reportingprozess, wo quasi der Staat und die Zivilgesellschaft berichten, was wurde getan, was wurde nicht getan. Und dann gibt's jährlich eine große Konferenz, wo die Zivilgesellschaft und die Verwaltung voneinander lernen, sich austauschen, was in der Praxis gut funktioniert. Die **Open Government Partnership** ist mittlerweile der definierende und vorantreibende Motor geworden um Transparenz durch Technologie voranzutreiben und Demokratien zu stärken.

Warum ist das Hamburger Transparenzgesetz ein Vorbild?

Weil es ein zentrales Transparenzregister definiert, einen Informationsfreiheitsbeauftragten hat, der vielleicht nicht die Kompetenzen hat, die man sich wünschen würde, aber immerhin – mehr als im geplanten Entwurf für ein österreichisches Gesetz. Und weil es sehr weitreichende Veröffentlichungspflichten hat, weil viele Dokumente, Daten, Informationen per Gesetz automatisch zu veröffentlichen sind und das recht weit definiert ist. Diese sind eben auf einer zentralen Transparenzplattform zu veröffentlichen. Weil das Hamburger Gesetz sogar noch weiter geht als die slowakische Regelung, nämlich nicht nur die verpflichtende Veröffentlichen von größeren Verträgen vorsieht, aber auch von Bauplänen etwa von größeren Bauprojekten mit Flächenwidmungsplänen, und so weiter. Sondern es enthält sogar noch eine Rücktrittsklausel, das heißt Verträge sind so zu gestalten, dass es nach Veröffentlichung eine Frist gibt, innerhalb der die Öffentlichkeit sozusagen Zeit hat Alarm zu schlagen und innerhalb der die Stadt Hamburg von dem Vertrag wieder zurücktreten kann. Das ist ein Resultat des Bauskandals bezüglich der Elbphilharmonie.

Welche technischen Frameworks kennst du alle um Open Data bereitzustellen, um für Transparenz zu sorgen.

Welche technischen Frameworks?

Genau, also welche Websites und welche technischen Frameworks du kennst, die dabei helfen Transparenz herzustellen. Also ich bin bei meiner Recherche auf CKAN gestoßen

Das powert sozusagen die Open Data Portale, vor allem von Österreich, EU und einigen anderen Ländern.

Weiß nicht, ob Österreich dabei ist.

Ich glaub schon, es sieht zwar ein bisschen anders aus, aber es ist glaub ich die Grundlage. Es ist nämlich auch so, dass die Portale untereinander kompatibel sind. Es gibt ja auch ein europäisches Datenportal, das die Daten des österreichischen spiegelt. Es ist auch ein bisschen subsidiär gedacht, dass Länderdatenportale auf das Bundesdatenportal seeden usw.

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Es gibt froide, als fragdenstaat.de von Open Knowledge auch Finnland und Österreich. Es gibt alavetelli, auch eine Freedom of Information Plattform. Es gibt mehrere Open Source Plattformen, die mySociety entwickelt hat, so Sachen wie whatdotheyknow - whatdotheyknow ist eigentlich alavetelli geworden. Aber die haben fixmystreet zum Beispiel und ein paar Open Source Portale eben auch für Anfragen an Abgeordnete oder Abgeordnetenprofile, also da gibt's ein paar Open Source Tools für Transparenz in gewissen Bereichen mySociety.org aus England.

Es gibt gewisse Daten Standards: es gibt den Open Contracting Data Standard zum Beispiel von der Open Contracting Partnership. Da geht's darum globale Datenstandards für Auftragsvergabedaten zu schaffen, damit die verlinkbar sind, analysierbar sind. Aber da gibt's auch Open Contracting Principles dazu, also da geht's dann nicht nur um die Daten sondern da gibt's dann auch die Policy Ebene dazu. Das ist etwas mit sehr sehr hohem Impact. Auftragsvergaben transparent zu machen hat mitunter den größten wirtschaftlichen Mehrwert bei was jetzt Transparenzreformen angeht.

Georgien beispielsweise hat durch die Umstellung auf ein total transparentes digitales Vergabesystem innerhalb von 4-5 Jahren geschätzt 500 Millionen Dollar gespart. Die Ukraine spart durch ein digitales transparentes procurement System ungefähr 1 Milliarde Dollar im Jahr. Bitte diese beiden Zahlen nachrecherchieren, das soll eine Größenordnung angeben, ist aber kein exakter zitierbarer Wert.

Die Weltbank schätzt, dass wenn ein Staat sein Vergabesystem von einem schlechten bürokratischen Offlinesystem auf ein transparentes Onlinesystem umstellt bis zu 20 % des Auftragsvolumens gespart werden können und das ständig. Das heißt, wenn ein Staat, und das ist bei Entwicklungsländern oft so, 50% seines Haushalts für Auftragsvergaben verwendet und da durch eine Reform, durch neue Technologien 20% des Volumens gespart werden können, dadurch werden massive neue Kapazitäten frei und er kann Ressourcen in andere Bereiche investieren.

Es gibt zum Beispiel im Bereich der Eigentümer von Unternehmen den Versuch einen Datenstandard zu schaffen. Bei beneficial ownership, also bei wirtschaftlichen Endeigentümern von Unternehmen gibt's auch die Arbeit an einem Datenstandard, weil das einfach Register sind, die nur einen wirklichen Mehrwert bringen, wenn sie open sind, d.h. wenn sie Open Data sind und wenn sie vernetzbar sind. Also, wenn sie über Ländergrenzen hinaus über verschiedene Bereiche hinaus vernetzbar sind, wenn ich dann Auftragsvergabedaten mit Unternehmensdaten verlinken kann um herauszufinden: Wer steht da wirklich dahinter, bei dem Bauauftrag, den diese Firma bekommen hat, wer profitiert am Ende. Da brauche ich Datenstandards um das zu verlinken.

Wer fällt dir noch ein als Expertinnen/Experten zum Thema staatliche Transparenz in Österreich oder in der EU?

In der EU? In der EU gibt's viele. Also es kommt wirklich auf den Transparenzaspekt an. Also du könntest schauen von https://transparencyinternational.eu , die zum Beispiel einen integrity Monitor betreiben, wo sie Daten zu Lobbyingtreffen von EU-Kommissaren oder Abgeordneten aufbereiten.

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Es gibt Access Info Europe (https://www.access-info.org/), die meine Vorsitzende im Board von der UNCAC Coalition, meinem Arbeitgeber sind. Die sind die führenden Experten in Europa, was Access to Information angeht.

Sehr cool ist https://fragdenstaat.de und das Team dahinter von der Open Knowledge Foundation, es gibt den Walter Palmetshofer von der Open Knowledge in Deutschland, der viel zu Open Data und dem wirtschaftlichen Mehrwert daraus macht. Es gibt in Österreich den Robert Harm, der beim Bundesrechenzentrum data.gv.at betreibt und auch ein Mitglied im Forum Informationsfreiheit ist und Open3 gegründet hat als ersten Open Data fokussierten Verein, oder einen der ersten. Der kennt sich mit Open Data sehr gut aus. Ja, das war's dann jetzt auch schon wieder. Also es kommt drauf an, es gibt auch in der Verwaltung Leute, die sich sehr gut mit dem Thema auskennen.

Weißt du in Österreich, also welche Stakeholder in Österreich für oder gegen Transparenz arbeiten?

Offiziell oder real?

Real

Gegen Transparenz? Ähm, naja Parteien, Großparteien vor allem, Teile der Verwaltung, Sozialpartner, gewisse Parlamentsklubs oder gewisse Landesparteien.

Interessensgruppen, die den Status Quo gerne behalten möchten durch Transparenz einen Machtverlust befürchten.

Also ich nehme nicht an, dass jemand offiziell sich dagegen ausspricht?

Nein, also es werden Bedenken geäußert, die oft sehr uninformierte Bedenken, was Datenschutz und Persönlichkeitsrechte betrifft, sind. Es gibt dann natürlich die politischen Aussagen, dass man zum Beispiel...

Also du kannst die zum Beispiel die Stellungnahmen aus dem Begutachtungsverfahrens zum Informationsfreiheitsgesetz 2015 anschauen. Da gab's eine Ausschussbegutachtung im Verfassungsausschuss, da könntest du dir die Stellungnahmen der Länder ansehen, die sehr auf der Bremse stehen, die wollen sich vom Bund kein Vorgaben machen lassen.

Die ÖVP sagt, sie will keinen Informationsfreiheitsbeauftragten, weil es ja vor einigen Jahren eine Verwaltungsreform gab, die zu einer Reduzierung der Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeit und verschiedenen Behörden geführt hat und jetzt kann man nicht schon wieder eine neue Behörde gründen, die dann irgendwie noch das Thema vorantreiben sollte.

Ja, es gibt natürlich verschiedene Argumente, die aber effektiv auf eine Transparenzverhinderung hinauslaufen. Und es gibt natürlich Behörden, einzelne, die sehr auf der Bremse stehen. Von der Stadt Wien über das Land Niederösterreich. Also schwer zusammenzufassen und es ist natürlich immer schwer zu quantifizieren oder qualifizieren wer jetzt gegen Transparenz ist. Es gibt halt immer einzelne Verfahren oder einzelne Aktionen, die Transparenz nicht vorantreiben, aber man könnte auch argumentieren, dass die Abgeordneten in Österreich kein Interesse an Transparenz haben, denn hätte

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die Mehrheit der Abgeordneten ein höheres Transparenzinteresse hätten sie einerseits ein Informationsfreiheitsgesetz beschließen können, hätten sich aber auch selbst Kontrollrechte geben können. Sie hätten zum Beispiel das Interpellationsrecht so gestalten können, dass Abgeordnete Zugang zu staatlichen Dokumenten bekommen können, was sie nicht können. Also es ist eine weit verbreitete institutionelle Zufriedenheit mit dem Status Quo, die vielleicht in den letzten Jahren langsam abgenommen hat. Langsam hat sich vielleicht das Erkenntnis durchgesetzt, dass mehr Transparenz doch nicht immer ganz so schlecht wäre, aber es hat bislang nicht gereicht um ein Gesetz auf den Weg zu bringen.

5.1.2 Preliminary Interview - Translation

Date of interview: Friday 9/25/2020 – 17:30Medium: online interview via videochat, recording via audio Recorder. Transcript shortened to exclude greeting, farewell, and interruption by Helicopter, not all noises were transcribed. Proofread and corrected on 12/9/2020. Approved for use on 12/15/2020. Translated on 19/10/2021.

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked in **bold** in the transcript)

Interviewee: Mathias Huter, transparency and Anti-Corruption Activist

Secretary General of the Forum for Freedom of Information (`https://www.informationsfreiheit.at`), Managing Director of the **UNCAC** Coalition (`https://uncaccoalition.org`)

What is the need for transparency or what are the positive or negative effects of transparency? effects does transparency have, i.e. in terms of governmental transparency?

That always depends on the context, I think basically it enables transparency on the one hand enables control by the public – comprehensibility, for example, how which decisions are taken by whom decisions are made by whom, what happens to taxpayers' money, and on the other hand transparency also enables the public to have a say, for example when it comes to processes, ongoing procedures, environmental procedures, or open open co-decision-making processes. These are at least two major components. Transparency creates the possibility or is actually a condition for public participation, for the public, for citizens to have a say, but also for control. for control.

What is the status quo in Austria and what has improved or worsened in recent years? improved or worsened in recent years?

The laws have essentially remained the same, there are findings Austrian courts and rulings of the European Court of Human Human Rights, which could provide a basis for more transparency, as it were transparency, but which have not been implemented in practice or in the way in which transparency is practiced in our country have not really changed so far. At the European level, there are various that Austria has to implement or has implemented. There was then more transparency in specific aspects. On the one hand, there is the Public Sector Information Directive, implemented in Austria by the

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Information Reuse Act, which was reformed and further developed under the Austrian which was reformed and further developed under the Austrian Council Presidency. This offers no legal basis for obtaining more information, but rather it regulates what can be done with information, with data records and documents that have already been published by the public sector.

However, there is a process at the European level at the moment, where the the EU Commission identifies so-called high value datasets, which are which, as soon as they have been determined, are to be made freely accessible throughout accessible throughout Europe. Exactly what these will be is not yet clear yet, but these are primarily data sets that have a high economic economic value, but which at the same time - and this is not mutually not mutually exclusive, could also have a high value in terms of democratic politics or could have a great added value in terms of public control. value. Or, perhaps, this is another aspect that transparency can bring about. transparency can bring about, the best possible use of knowledge that has already been that has already been paid for and created, so that it can be used by all kinds of interest groups & actors can continue to use. So much much about the European level.

Since my background is mainly fighting corruption there are still special topics, such as the register of beneficial register of beneficial owners, which according to the 5th EU Money Laundering Directive must now be publicly accessible. In Austria, unfortunately a payment barrier, but if you pay €3, you have access to this register. to this register. This is where you can find the persons who are behind company networks or behind legal entities. So not who the direct owners of a company are, but who is at the end of a chain of owners. of a chain of owners.

For example, we now have data on public-sector contracts worth more than public sector contracts worth more than €50,000, which we process at https://offenevergaben.at. This will be published as Open Data in accordance with the Federal Procurement Act 2018, has also been introduced in the course of EU standards, so to speak. Often where there is a little more transparency, this comes about at the suggestion or or obligation of the EU. But then you see, for example, the Covid-19 aid funds, which are completely non-transparent. Who receives which who is receiving which subsidies or funds is in no way traceable.

At the same time, however, it is the case with the EU that every time EU funds are funds are used somewhere, the recipients must be published. This example also illustrates the differences in transparency between transparency between European funds and Austrian funds. funds.

In certain areas, there have even been regressions, if you look at the transparency database and the Transparency Database Act. are taken into account. Here, for example, sanctions have been increased that are on it, if you process data from the transparency database that is already secret. which are already secret. For example, the administrative penalties were have been massively increased. These administrative penalties are imposed when data that is neither data that is neither covered by the Data Protection

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Act nor by the ... nor under the . So here there's still the penalty, although processed data would actually not be sensitive.

How much transparency is actually needed?

A great deal, in fact it should always be the case where the use of public of public funds, but where at the same time it is not about legal legal claims, apart from pension payments or social benefits, whenever there is, so to speak, a political leeway for decision-making I think there should be a minimum of transparency and traceability. and traceability.

And legitimate interests in secrecy must always be weighed against the public interest. public interest. There would have to be – according to a modern Freedom of Information Act – 2 tests would have to be applied. First, the grounds for secrecy be clearly defined in a law. Then then, according to the case law of the European Court of Court of Human Rights would have to be necessary and and proportionate in a democracy. And then, in the specific case, one would have to look at whether whether information is generally covered by a secrecy ground. falls under a reason for secrecy. If the answer is yes, two tests would have to be applied. would have to be applied.

First a harm test, where one looks: Would there really be a concrete and secrecy, would a concrete and comprehensible damage be caused to the and comprehensible harm would occur. And if the answer to that is yes then you would have to do the public interest test, where you look at look: Okay, so there is damage, but is there a public interest here that has to be public interest that is to be valued more highly?

That is, for example, if there are major corruption allegations against a high-ranking politician. against a high-ranking politician. He is asked to disclose his to disclose his private calendar. One could perhaps argue that that this violates the legitimate secrecy or privacy interests of the privacy interests of the politician concerned. But at the same time it could be that the public interest in the clarification clearly outweighs this interest clearly outweighs this interest in secrecy, and therefore the transparency would have to be decided.

So there needs to be a lot of transparency, but of course there are also simply areas where one can legitimately argue that there is no public interest. interest. Simply when information could only affect citizens but it doesn't concern a particular use of public funds or certain decisions of an of public money or certain decisions of an authority or an elected Representative.

Could this be tied to certain amounts of money, for example? After all, social assistance is one thing where, for me, there is a legitimate interest for the protection of the privacy of the person concerned. There was a court ruling on farmer subsidies, so you can tie it to an amount of money to a monetary amount or a discretionary amount somewhere, at which point something should remain secret and not be published, at least should not be published, at least should not be published by name?

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So, on the one hand, you could say that legal claims are not necessarily to be published. So if I have a legal claim to unemployment benefit, social welfare or pension payments, then there is no room for there is no room for political maneuver.

In the case of agricultural subsidies, the special case is that we are dealing with legal persons who are also natural persons at the same time, because a farm is an farm is an economic enterprise, but at the same time is often is not a limited liability company, but the farmer himself/herself is also the farm. In principle, I would recommend in the case of social benefits, especially where there is a legal entitlement, I would not see the public interest as being increased. So I don't think that there is a need for unconditional traceability, but rather there are very legitimate interests in secrecy. Wherever it is a question of legal persons who are not legal persons who are not at the same time natural persons, I actually see the public interest is usually predominant. So whenever whenever it's a question of whether an association, an organisation, a company received funds, received a license, etc., I would generally not see any I would not see any secrecy interests as a rule, but actually should be the case that if you receive funds or services as a legal entity from the from the state as a legal entity, that you also have to comply with this explicitly or implicitly agree to this traceability.

Which EU countries or other countries are role models for transparency and why? transparency and why is that the case?

That depends on the area, you can't really generalise. generalise. England, for example, is very good when it comes to the disclosure of company the disclosure of company books and free access to online data, for example e.g. who owns companies, who are the ultimate owners, who are the beneficial owners of companies and so on. beneficial owners of companies and so on.

Slovakia has a very good policy, namely the compulsory publication of public contracts, usually as a full-text document. full text document. The open data aspect is unfortunately not always very pronounced. Documents must be available on the Internet for all to see, otherwise the contracts are not legally binding or valid. Normally there is a barrier of 1000 € in contract value here and this applies to almost all contract awards. There are some exceptions for example for the rent of graves or for standardized work contracts of the public sector, but otherwise this applies to contract awards, to privatizations privatizations, for licenses, for permits, for public-private partnerships Partnerships, for leases, for grants, and so on.

So whenever a contract comes into being between a private party and the public and the public sector, it has to be published. This has been in place for about ten years and it has proven to be a very effective anti-corruption anti-corruption tool, because it is in the interest of both partners that the that the contract comes into effect, that a payment can be made, for example, and that the can be made and that this can be viewed on the Internet.

As far as the freedom of information act is concerned, Slovenia is very good, also because they have a very well-designed freedom of information commissioner who who has very

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wide-ranging powers.

In Germany, for example, there is Hamburg, which has a very solid law. And in some countries, there are also cities that have very innovative approaches. innovative approaches. So there are in different areas different good practice approaches. And the Slovak model with the other countries have already adopted the Slovak model with the contracts. to my knowledge, the Czech Republic, Hamburg, Northern Macedonia and Serbia. so to speak.

You probably know **RTI-Rating.org (Right to Information Rating), they have rated Austria on the last place with the last update in last update in 2016, would you agree with the opinion that Austria is Austria is in the last place in terms of transparency?**

So to this the Full Disclosure that I have reviewed this, respectively the Update made.

Ah okay, good, because you are not listed there as an expert I think

I don't know at all. Um, so I didn't do the initial assessment. I just reviewed it and corrected it a little bit. It's that this rating only evaluates the law itself, not its application and implementation. not its application and implementation, which is why Afghanistan is currently ranked 1, because they simply have the best law on paper, whereas the practice is probably a different story.

Austria is the only country in the European Union and the last major democracy in major democracy in Europe that does not grant its citizens the right to access to access government documents.

And we just have the worst freedom of information law, we have don't have a freedom of information law, we have the worst information regulation or the worst legal regulation to somehow get to get information from the public authorities among these 130 countries. countries. It may well be that the administration functions somewhat better than in some of the better than in some of the other 129 countries and that certain information may be information is perhaps easier to obtain than in other countries, but on the whole, there is a lack of legal entitlement and the possibility of especially when it comes to politically sensitive issues or documents. sensitive issues or documents, there is no possibility to get them in practice. possibility to get them, and that's why Austria deserves this very this very bad place in this rating.

How do you see transparency with regard to distortion of competition? and would it be desirable to have a harmonized right of information at EU level? harmonized right to information by means of a directive?

I don't know of any distorting effects that have been proven through transparency. through transparency...

Also through lack of transparency

Oh, so through lack of transparency. I cannot evaluate that now legally quite evaluate. Procurement, for example, and competition regulations are regulated and standardized

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at the European level, there are minimum standards minimum standards and their own rules on access to information, so to speak, information obligations on the part of the authorities. Of course, the lack of freedom of freedom of information in Austria is a competitive disadvantage, if you have to research from the European or Austrian public sector, studies, expert opinions or studies or expert opinions or data, etc. But so far the EU Commission has not taken a mandate for this field, on the other hand on the other hand, in the environmental sector, where this mandate based on the Aarhus Convention the Environmental Information Act, so here there are higher minimum standards. higher minimum standards. More transparency would of course be politically desirable, but I don't know whether it is really possible on the basis of competitive is possible, I don't know.

You mentioned open data. What is the status in Austria? With Open Data, is there a central platform that provides data as Open Data? as Open Data and is it reliable?

There is data.gv.at, which is operated by the Federal Computing Center. There is a group of Open Data decision makers or promoters from the public sector, but there is no public sector, but there is no central body that would take politically active here. So there is a body that promotes the topic on a voluntary basis. voluntary basis, and these are representatives of the administration who are very and representatives who are very committed. But what is missing is a with a political mandate and, above all, with the resources to push the to push the issue further. There is also no strong legal basis. legal basis, there are Open Data aspects in some laws, for example in the Federal for example the Federal Procurement Act, but that is why it would be would be desirable for Austria to join the Open Government Partnership and thus also define a clear responsibility in the federal government, have a small a small team that would really be responsible for open government and open data. and open data, which is not the case so far. There used to be someone in the Federal Chancellery who was responsible, but I'm not sure if this not sure if that still exists.

Who is part of the Open Government Partnership?

The Open Government Partnership is, in fact, an international organisation, which was founded ten years ago on the initiative of private foundations, but also the Obama administration, Brazil and France and a few others. It has countries as members, Austria is one of the few European countries which Austria is one of the few European countries that is not a member. It is a mechanism, so to speak, under which administrations and civil society come together, define action plans or goals at the national level, how democracy and transparency can be strengthened through technology. can be strengthened through technology, then action plans between administration and politics and civil society are worked out for a state. These are then or are supposed to be worked through within two years. Then there is a review and reporting process, where the state and civil society report on what has been done. civil society report on what has been done and what has not been done. And then there's a big conference every year where civil society and the administration civil society and the administration learn from each other and exchange

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information on what works well in practice. The **Open Government Partnership** is has become the defining and driving engine for advancing Advance transparency through technology and strengthen democracies.

Why is the Hamburg Transparency Law a role model?

Because it defines a central transparency register, has a Freedom of Information Commissioner, who may not have the competences that one would wish for, but still – more than in the planned draft for an Austrian law. And because it has very far-reaching publication obligations, because many documents, data, information has to be published automatically by law and it's that is defined quite broadly. These are to be published on a central transparency platform. Because the Hamburg law goes goes even further than the Slovakian regulation, namely not only the mandatory publication of major contracts, but also of construction plans but also of construction plans, for example of larger construction projects with zoning plans, and so on. But it even contains a that is, contracts are to be designed in such a way that, after publication, there is a period of time that there is a period of time after publication within which the public has time to sound the alarm and within which the city of Hamburg can withdraw from the contract. can withdraw from the contract. This is a result of the construction scandal concerning the Elbe Philharmonic Hall.

Which technical frameworks do you all know to make Open Data to provide transparency.

Which technical frameworks?

Exactly, so what websites and what technical frameworks do you that help to provide transparency. So I came across my research I came across CKAN

That kind of powers the Open Data portals, especially of Austria, EU and some other countries.

Don't know if Austria is part of it.

I think so, it looks a little bit different, but it's I think it is the basis. Because it is also the case that the portals are are compatible with each other. There is also a European data data portal that mirrors the data of the Austrian portal. It is also a bit subsidiary, that the country data portals are linked to the Federal data portal seeden etc.

There are froide, as fragdenstaat.de of Open Knowledge also Finland and Austria. There is alavetelli, also a Freedom of Information platform. There are several open source platforms that mySociety has has developed, things like whatdotheyknow - whatdotheyknow has actually become alavetelli. But they have fixmystreet for example and a few open source portals also for inquiries to members of parliament or profiles of members of parliament, so there are a few open source tools for Transparency in certain areas mySociety.org from England.

There are certain data standards: there is the Open Contracting Data Standard for example from the Open Contracting Partnership. This is about to create global data

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standards for contracting data, so that they are so that they can be linked and analysed. But there are also Open contracting principles, so it's not just about the data, but there are also the but also the policy level. This is something with very high impact. Making the awarding of contracts transparent the greatest economic added value in terms of transparency reforms. transparency reforms.

Georgia, for example, by switching to a totally digital procurement system within 4-5 years, Georgia has saved an estimated 500 million dollars. Ukraine saved approximately transparent procurement system approximately 1 billion USD a year. Please research these two figures, this is to give an order of magnitude, but is not an exact quote. indicate, but is not an exact quotable value.

The World Bank estimates that if a state changes its procurement system from a from a poor bureaucratic offline system to a transparent online system online system, up to 20 % of the contract volume can be saved, and that and that all the time. This means that if a state, and this is often the case with often the case in developing countries, spends 50% of its budget on procurement and through a reform, through new technologies, 20% of the volume can be volume can be saved, massive new capacities are freed up and resources can be freed up and it can invest resources in other areas.

For example, in the area of business ownership, there is an Attempt to create a data standard. In the case of beneficial ownership, i.e. beneficial owners of companies, there is also work on a data standard, because the work on a data standard, because these are simply registers that only bring real only bring real added value if they are open, i.e., if they are open data and if they are data and if they can be networked. That is, if they can be networked across different areas, if I can then link order placement data with company data. can link procurement data with company data in order to find out find out: Who is really behind the construction contract that this this company has received, who will profit in the end. I need data standards to link that.

Who else can you think of as experts on the topic of government transparency in Austria or in the EU?

In the EU? There are many in the EU. So it really depends on the transparency aspect. So you could look from https://transparencyinternational.eu , who, for example, run an integrity monitor, where they prepare data about lobbying meetings of EU commissioners or members of parliament.

There's Access Info Europe (https://www.access-info.org/), which my Chair on the Board of the UNCAC Coalition, my employer. They are the leading experts in Europe on access to information. as far as it goes.

Very cool is https://fragdenstaat.de and the team behind it from the Open Knowledge Foundation, there is Walter Palmetshofer from the Open Knowledge in Germany, who does a lot of work on Open Data and the economic added value of it. In Austria, there is Robert Harm, who works at the data.gv.at and who is also a member of the Forum for Freedom of and founded Open3 as the first Open Data-focused association. focused

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association, or one of the first. He knows a lot about Open Data very well. Yes, that's it again now. So it depends it depends, there are also people in the administration who are very well with the topic.

Do you know which stakeholders in Austria are working for or against transparency?

Official or real?

Real

Against transparency? Um, well, parties, major parties in particular, parts of the administration, social partners, certain parliamentary clubs or certain state parties.

Interest groups that would like to keep the status quo fear a loss of power through fear a loss of power through transparency.

So I don't suppose that anyone officially opposes this? against it?

No, so concerns are being expressed, often very uninformed concerns, in terms of privacy and personal rights. There there are of course the political statements that you can, for example....

So you can read the, for example, the statements from the review process for the 2015 Freedom of Information Act. There was a committee review in the Constitutional Committee, where you could the statements of the states, which are very much on the brakes. they don't want to be dictated to by the federal government.

The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) says it does not want a freedom of information commissioner because there was because a few years ago there was an administrative reform that resulted in a which led to a reduction of administrative jurisdiction and various authorities and now you can't create a new authority again, which then somehow which should then somehow drive the issue forward.

Yes, there are various arguments, of course, but they effectively amount to a transparency prevention. And there are, of course, authorities, individual ones that are very much on the brakes. From the city of Vienna to the Lower Austria. So it's hard to summarize, and of course it's difficult to quantify or qualify who is against transparency. transparency. There are always individual procedures or individual individual actions that do not promote transparency, but you could also argue that the members of parliament in Austria are not interested in transparency because transparency, because if the majority of the members of parliament had a greater interest in transparency, they could have passed a a Freedom of Information Act, but they could also have given themselves control rights. given themselves rights of control. For example, they could have right of interpellation in such a way that deputies could have access to state state documents, which they cannot do. So there is a widespread institutional satisfaction with the status quo, which has quo that has perhaps slowly diminished in recent years. Slowly, perhaps, there has been a realization that more transparency would not always be such a bad thing, but it has not been enough to bring not enough to get a law off the ground.

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5.1.3 Guided Interviews

All of these interviews were online interviews via video chat, recorded with an audio recorder. They have been slightly adapted, some filling sounds (e.g. uhm) and repetitions have been erased. My comments will be placed in either of these brackets [ ] < >. All interviews have been held either in English or in German, if they were held in German we will first post the original and also include an English translation later on, if anything is ambiguous, the German file is the original.

Some interviews have been anonymized, which is stated at the beginning of each interview. All interviews have been transcribed automatically, checked and corrected manually and afterwards were sent to the interviewed person. They then had the possibility to read it, correct it and rephrase unclear sentences. Only when they agreed, which all of them did, we included them in this masters thesis. We were granted the right to use all of these interviews in this masters thesis.

5.1.4 Date of interview: 7th of February 2021 - anonymous

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: anonymized Journalist from Austria

Thank you for sharing your time, um, I will start right away with some organisational questions. Am I allowed to record this interview? Yes, you are.

Is it OK to name you and your organisation, your employer? If not, I can anonymize everything.

Actually, as I'm a freelance journalist. It's like, you know, in theory, I do have many employers who are in the media industry and in radio. So one of them would be [anonymized radio station 1] radio station. [anonymized radio station 1] the other one is [anonymized radio station name]. And so they are not my employers, like, you know, like I'm the employee, but and they're mostly the ones I provide my stories to. So and I and I just don't want to have, like, this misinterpretation, that they are my employers and I can talk on their behalf since I'm a freelance journalist.

So this is [anonymized radio station name] and [anonymized radio station name] are the stations I give my stories to. But they are not my employers in this instance. I'm a freelance journalist like they are no big employers. So as you wish, if I could choose, I would prefer to stand for myself. But if it's better for you to have an employer standing there like who does she provide her stories to you, then you might name [anonymized radio station name].

OK,

it's starting complicated. I'm sorry.

No, no, no, that's fine. It's just those are like regular standardized questions. And I understand your case and you're not speaking in case for [anonymized]

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or [anonymized]. And it's just the question for me.Can I categorise you as a journalist and who would I name the employer and and for you, you're a freelance journalist, so you don't have them as an employer. So the question was only if I could if I do a transcript and provide this transcript to someone, if this person can see, OK, I had this interview with you with the name or I could anonymize your name, OK?

No, no, you didn't have to anonymize it. I mean, unless I, I'm starting to say something really shitty then anonymize me, but I hope I'm not **OK.**

So, let's start with the first question

In which countries I work, right?

Um, should it go through for that?

Oh, oh, yeah, yeah, sorry, sorry, I was just about to read this and I skipped it, I should just mark it.

The country's I work in is basically Austria. Sometimes it's Germany and but in theory, my work affects everyone who is somehow able to talk German, and sometimes when we do stories, of course, they spread wider thanks to the Internet. And so and basically that let's call it the European Union level. That's the theory we are spreading usually. But our main focus is, of course, in Austria. So this is very spread anyways, I think, due to the latest [anonymized radio station name 1] numbers there are [number anonymized] people over here who are listening on a daily basis. I forgot the numbers for. [anonymized radio station name 2] I'm sorry.

And so it's Austria, but thank you, Internet. In theory, it's it's also spreading sometimes with some words we do or I do and which I could name like. There was a programme an EU programme which is called Clean IT, and the question was, and how can we standardize it? And with Google and Facebook and whatsoever. And so when I did report about that, I'm pretty sure that everyone in the EU Commission was eager to hear what the story was afterwards. And the general tasks of the organisations I am working for is II in the general sense, but mostly it's security and issues and topics, but also uhm like coming from the technical aspect, I'm very much caring about what does it mean for society?

So like if something's happening like a cybersecurity incident, like solar winds, then you have on one hand, what does it mean technically? What happens? Which companies are affected? But on the other hand, it means what does it mean for us as a society if we have these pieces of espionage, if there is another level that added to our world as we know it, and how does it affect us as a society? And what what changes are suggested or what or what utopia is suggested regarding depending on who you ask?

Of course. So that's basically what I'm doing.

Thank you. Um, is, um, government and state transparency something you come and touch in your daily or monthly work? And if yes, please describe

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how.

And actually it does occur of course, um. Most of the time since, as I said before, in IT security, it starts with business transparency like and not every company is very happy to provide information if they got breached. Uhm but in the wider regard, of course, it's also state transparency. I can't say it's a daily basis, it's certainly not. Monthly, I, I don't know, it really does depend in my case on the topic I'm doing, like when I did research in the breach of the Austrian exterior ministry, then, of course, you know, I crossed this part where I said, like, it is transparent, it's not transparent. So I crossed it, but it's nothing I'm focussing on, let's put it that way.

Have you worked with laws on a regional country or EU level that enable you to access information held by public authorities like right to information laws Transparenzgesetz in Österreich? Informationsfreiheitsgesetz in Deutschland.

Actually, I.

I did read the question before, but I wasn't sure what it actually meant, like I stumbled over these issues time by time, but I know I didn't I didn't go to Europol and they said, like, yeah, go there and there and here you have the right information. So it's usually like in my work I have the topic. And then, you know, I dig my way to answers that I get or I don't get. But

A tip or a hint is something we always get, but it was not like this line of work I am proceeding. If I compare it to the FOIA request in the US, for example, it's not like that. I fill out request forms and then I get the answer. This is nothing that I am doing on a regular basis.

OK.

Um, so basically, this means I can skip the other question.

Um.

So you have never used the right to information laws to obtain information.

Just to make it clear,

No I haven't.

OK.

Okay then, I can skip this and I can skip this

But I can I can tell you the reason.

Oh yeah, please. Please.

The reason why I didn't use it is that on one hand and in some cases, I just didn't make it right, like the European Commission has a very clear site where you can request this information, for example, I would use it if I needed it, but I am in Austria. To give you

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a specific example. I would either see no chance of getting the information or to put it bluntly, I'm wasting my time because this is the part where they will say, like, oh, this is why we can't give you this information. So we have some NGOs. Finn, I forgot what the interview was finished working it and also give prices for the weakest excuses to not give your information. So it makes more sense to watch these prices, to see how you get stonewalled, than to ask for yourself as it's a waste of time. And it's like to me, it seemed always more reasonable to let other political parties. Use this right for the chance they get an answer is bigger than if some someone from civil society tries to get an answer. So it's like let the others do the job. But I don't have usually because we have to deliver stories quickly. So most of the time in my stories, it will be. Yeah. Well, we asked, but they didn't give an answer and this and that was their excuse. I'm not focussing on so much investigative or I don't get the time to be focussing on investigative stories. So I don't have half a year to wait for someone to tell me. Well, yeah, but that's privacy.

So this is the reason why I don't even start doing it, and you know just why we really are also depending just to put it bluntly, on organisations like Belllingcat, on organisations like, let's keep it with Belllingcat as an example for NGOs who have and or yeah, I know. You know. Everyone I know, it doesn't make any sense to namedrop all of them. But it really helps us if these organisations are like the pitbull terriers of the right of information because they keep and stick to these topics and they don't give up if they get a No or if they get "privacy" and. So this is where I do think that journalism benefits very much from, as we very often don't have the time, don't get the resources and the back up to really stick to a topic. If not a dedicated platform of journalism who are dedicated to being investigative to name Glenn Greenwald here or someone like that, who'll say that's exactly what we do, you know like get every information we want to.

But if you say, like: Do this story and next week we want to have this story on air or in our paper, then you are lost in Austria with even imagining getting a response that makes sense. If you do it through this official ways.

At least that's my experience. I mean, I'd be happy to know that I did something wrong and there is a very quick way with very good information.

And I just didn't know that because I'm stupid. I, I, I'd love to learn about that.

OK, thank you.

Um, so I can I guess I can script...

That's the positive and negative experience as well.

Yeah, yeah. No, no, that's that's uh that's a perfectly valid answer and and I can totally relate to it. So trying to be uh, I'm trying to remain neutral, but yeah, I share some of those experiences.

I can imagine.

Uh, so I will skip a couple of questions, uh, but, uh, actually, do you know, uh, frameworks that provide transparency, like like Internet sites, websites?

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Now is the time for namedropping. Oh, yeah. Um. I don't know that the exact URL because this is why and let's put it that way: "Google is your friend". Whenever I need that I google my way through to them. But what I do know, of course, is the FOIA request for the US, we do have it in the European Commission like there is a really

And I want to really say something positive. Now, the European Commission really has a good guide to lead you through. What is your request? What do you want to know? This is the way you have to go. And they made it nicely so that everyone, even if he or she has no perfect knowledge of the Internet and doesn't code to find a way to get the answers to the questions they might have. So it's a nicely done site because I always think that's also important to be able to find something and then to be guided through what you have to do and not like, oh, we can't answer it because you missed to click I agree somewhere which we seem to be hiding, but hey this is where it is, we were not hiding that. And so we do have it in Austria, of course, but it's to me. But that might be myself, you know, like being not educated enough. It seems to be hidden. It's not that. And it's the first thing you stumble upon when you open the website, but. You might find it, and this is why I say Google is your friend, because through google searches you will find that easier than if you go on the website of let's say the parliament, because there is so much information, that it takes you some time to find your way in. And if the wording in the search field is not exactly the way the wording has to be, then it will say, hey, wait, we don't have any answer for you. Sorry we didn't find that one. But that's, uhm, I don't think that's on purpose because anyone who goes to the ISP of their trust will find out that as soon as you have the problem, you won't find it on the website and you will end up calling your ISP with a certain problem because websites are overloaded. And so I don't think it's... It's a negative experience for me, but it doesn't mean it has to be a negative experience for everyone. Perhaps if you get used to it, then it's very clear and it makes very much sense. For me as a not regular user or a person who does not read regularly into these fields because, you know, when you get... in Austria, it's like if you get an answer to a question we have this answer to public. And then if you go there on a regular basis and then you might know your ways already. And ah I have to look here and ah here is the answer and here is the request. If you don't do that, then to me, it's sometimes confusing, which was the answer and which was the question and why do I have to open a PDF here again? And why doesn't it follow a structure where I know this is where it started? This is what it costs the question to come up in the first place, and this is the answer we got.

And is the answer satisfying yes or no to the party who answered the question? So this is very, very confusing to me. But I do think that if you are using it on a regular basis, then it might not be as confusing as it is to me.

This is why I mentioned I don't do it on a regular basis. So it might be just me being not so into the topics of how to provide answers if people have questions. But my personal experience with the Austrian site is confusing European Union sites very clear and nicely structured and FOIA very interesting. And this is the three I have to do mostly if I.

Your last critique was to parliament.gv.at, right? Yes, yes, yeah,

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And the FOIA siteyou meant was fragdenstaat.at, for example? No, I really meant the US version.

The US Version, OK, OK.

Oh and fragdenstaat, yes and that's the thing, I'm sorry about that. Fragdenstaat, I do know that, but I didn't use it, so I know most of the frameworks and I see what they did. And sometimes during my research, I'm looking into that. But I never drop a question myself.

Is there a reason why you don't use them?

Uhm yeah, I didn't have to.

OK.

Because this is... I'm doing... I'm not... Well, let's put it that way.

The topics I cover are very many times scientific topics, so I'm not doing very much...

I don't know, actually, I didn't, I never had a reason to do it. It's not that I didn't want to do it or like I dodge them, but I'm in the science department. So the art by design, talking more to scientists, we are not... or I mean,... I can't say like every one of the journalists there, but I'm more talking to scientists and. It is more like, as I said before, if it's not about a breach then it's about what does it mean for society? And this is where I am in sociology and.

When we, when I cover topics, it's most of the time that an issue already has arisen, so someone says this is the problem and we think that's unfair, but this would be a step,... a step later, like the question, hey, what happened there?

I do fragdenstaat.at, for example, would be the step before then. Someone says, like, oh, I did that, but I don't like the answer I got. And because they didn't answer me and this is usually when my stories would start if it's in privacy related topics. And. I mean, DSGVO does it count?

Not really right?

DSGVO? Not really

Because sometimes I deal with them, sometimes I do stuff with these people as well, but I didn't think that it so much going into that direction.

So you ask for your own data?.

Yeah I try to talk to them I mean. Not very successfully, but I mean, sometimes they answer the phone.

Oh, do you mean you talk with the Datenschutzbehörde?

Datenschutzbehörde

Ah ok

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Yeah, but I don't think it's the same topic we're talking here.

No, no.

You know, it's something different. So I wouldn't mention them.

But yeah, I mean, it's like I used the outcome of frameworks, but I am not the one who initially started something through the framework.

It's probably perhaps based on that and the journalists who are dedicated to online articles, they're really fast and they have to be really in time. And there is much other online outlets. So with radio, we.

I think to try to compete there is lost ground anyways, to be fast and I'm doing 20 minute stories, to try to dig deeper into a topic and to make it explainable to the public. So and the scoop to say. Yeah, I found something out because I asked fragdenstaat and now we know this or that. That's not so much of my resort.

What did you say in the end, that's not so much of what?

my resort.

OK

The line where I'm working it. I do think that it changed to online journalism to be very, very quick, uhm into, you know, uhm, not monitoring the sites, like when you check emails, I don't know for sure. But I do think from what I see from the colleagues who are working online, that they really have a monitoring system like what did come up on this or that side? What news are there? And to use it on a more regular basis, just to be clear for their stories, what it means and what it doesn't mean, because they're more on the moment of... this happens, like politically.

So we make this request and we want to know what the next step I think it's shifted more to online because when I think of radio or classic radio like vintage podcasts. And I don't see there either like with colleagues, that there is a high usage of these platforms being used, but maybe I don't know, I don't want to speak for anyone else.

Could you decide on one, specific frameworks that should be the standard framework for you on country level? And if yes, which one?

Um, actually, um, that's really just a personal opinion.

Oh, I think I want to be anonymous, but really [laughing]. But it makes it easier to speak really. Um, I think.

To me, what would make sense is if the European Union decided to design one framework, which all partners of the European Union use then for themselves, which meets up at the European Union like you have. And I know we are all those like centralized ideas. But in this case, it does make sense to me that you have within the European Union the countries, the collective, with all the requests under the same framework everybody uses in the countries.

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So if you as a person in Austria, want to do a request in why soever? And because it's possible, let's imagine it's possible in Italy, then you don't necessarily have to learn a new platform and then you do what's necessary for this and that. But you do it on the same mainframe and they don't have to be collected like.

Like exchange information, but just use the same framework, they don't need to have an API or something like that, but so that the user who is not into IT but who, you know, navigates the Internet visually by seeing what looks like that, OK, this is Firefox and this is Chrome, because the one has the Red Fox and the other one has this nice little colours who says like, oh, I know this because it's the same as I know it for my country. And this would encourage people to use other platforms. This would also help the European Union themselves to be able to navigate, to see similarities. And I'm really addressing that see is because many people are so much into, oh, let's use the data and make a valid comparison, like did the same questions arise in country A and country B. And let's look at how we are doing regarding our transparency, but to also have it visualized. And then use. Deep-L as a translation program to know what the other questions are, where, have been. But this is something where I say this would be a thing for the European Union to do, to make the rules, to make the standards and to guarantee like a quality line what we expect a democracy where we say we are members of the European Union standardized, which is... we... our measurements lack at the moment, what we think is a good democracy and what we define as being good. But I hopefully do think that's a good idea to have European Union. So and instead of blaming another country by saying, oh, we don't like this person who is in charge and we think this one's nicer and this is what they do better, we should

and starting with European Union, have standardized measurements of how are we doing. And this is one puzzle piece like the right of information, the transparency the state gives to its own citizens, which defines what democracy is existing and how we are living our democracy and how seriously we are taken by our government. When they say like, yeah, that's a legit question. Let's try to answer that. And if we can't satisfy you with this answer, then perhaps we need a new law or we need to change something because democracy is a living process and to have this all come together in the European Union so that we do have the transparency like, hey look, there's a country that makes something better than us. And not point the finger at them and say, yeah, but there is five countries, that make it worse than us. But to say, like, OK, how can we all get better? And having the same framework is having the same standards. And we need to have the same IT standards provided by the organisation like the European Union, where we say we want to be part of it. Is the basis for us to evolve in what we understand as being a democracy so that you don't have people like me being in an interview and saying, yeah, I know about them, but know it's complicated and I don't know that to say like, yes, of course I do know them. It's standardized. I mean, European Union has it and so do we and so does Italy. And yeah, I know what you're talking.

Why do you even make a work about it? Because we all know it's natural to go there if we have a question. This should be our goal, shouldn't it? But we are a bit away

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from that so I have a strong opinion about - this should be a thing European Union is in charge to standardize, to have - through that as a puzzle piece, as I said before - a standardised mechanism how we want to

define ourselves and the democracy we live in and how we see the future of the democracy where we want to have next generations live in and define it and set new measurements and standards, because if there is something we know, then it's not about one person who is changing the world. It doesn't work anymore like that that you have one Individual doing something good and then everything's good. We are too much globalized, too much and relying on technique to support the world as it's growing, that it's not the individual, but it's the crowd that makes it different. The crowd decision like even I don't know, Greta Thunberg she wouldn't be able to support climate change all by herself. She's the one who raises her voice, but then it needed the other youth, it needed friday for future. So she's a good sign of that it needs very many people to do something. And then you might achieve a change, but it's not that one person show anymore. So what we need is the one infrastructure show, so that the many persons have the overview and they don't have to have been studying IT so they know which request is good wheresoever.

And actually it shouldn't be the work of NGOs as well. They do it because no one else is doing it, but and they should be doing something else already and focussing on something else, because, that's done. It's like we all want to see this as the basis of our democracy. So it's somehow funny that we - still are also, you know -having to deal with these topics. Finished.

The "too long didn't read" is that it should be standardized and the European Union should do it.

Do you know rti-rating.org?

And to be totally transparent, I didn't know it, but since I saw the question before, I know it, yes.

OK, Can you rate your overall impression on the information provided there?

uhm yeah, like my overall impression was good. For it very clearly showed you at the entrance already what it's about and what the ranking is, and you can look - what we all do at first - where am I standing. And I do think that they put a lot of effort into

showing how they provided the data, what basis they made the rankings on like why is country X better than country Z And they - what's funny - they didn't have an actual imprint, they have this contact tool to contact them, but it took me some time to find out who's behind that, because the first thing I always look if I see like, oh look there's a comparison, who's behind that?

And it's actually is it at the first site? And it's very clear. And they have the links to the organisations. And look, this is jurisdiction and you can trust us. And there is organisations where we think, one, I would trust them like on the first glance, but.

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There wasn't that transparency, it's in itself where you had like this one organisation who said, like a and I'm here for you, you can write me. It's the neutral formula, like write us. Um, but, um, no. It's a bit in the shadows, for whatever reason, they don't want to have to be able to address a specific organisation or a specific person, I don't know who's really, um, you know, answering.

It won't be all organisations who were named there, who would be answering if you write them, but it was quite interesting to me that the classic "this is our imprint" was missing there.

And though and so in the way I work, it took me some, you know, would you say like and with the horse, you start from the back, like settling it. So I was settling the horse starting at the back to look who's the organisation. So I followed all the lines to say, OK, are they valid? And if they say, yes, we have the data, then I can trust that they have the data. Because one thing that's challenging at our time is that we have to trust. I can't say yet: Give me the data and I will control it by myself, by feeding it into my system to see if these measurements... I can't reverse everything they've done in their work so they can give me this output, so I have to trust the organisations who are behind something that they did a good job and they didn't make any crucial mistakes. So without having that imprint and being a thing, I was like, I don't think it's good.

And it's a bit like Wikipedia to me. Wikipedia is really nice. If you want to have a first impression, what's this all about? But you shouldn't trust Wikipedia that it's all right or, you know, if it's its all facts. And neutral and one hatter in Wikipedia can destroy the work of very many good people who have to find the mistakes.

You saw it when Notre Dame was burning then. Yeah, there was also some nice Wikipedians to get some means. But if you were exciting, what's happening, then you probably would have fallen for the means as well. So this is at the first glance, I didn't really dig deep into it, but at first glance I was like, it's a nice indication. And if you're working on the story where you're like where are we standing, then it's a good thing to get an impression of how the world is structured in transparency.

But it's nothing where I would rather walk around and say, like, Hey, rti-rating said this and that so we are in the last front of old Europe, like what were we really? like forth last place? Austria?

. **No, Austria was in the last place**

Ah last place, OK

Yes . Last place ex aequo with palau.

Yeah. OK, so actually talking with friends I would.

I would say, like if you know RTI rating we're last place, that's awful, but I wouldn't take it for granted, this is the world as it actually is. For we have, what these systems are missing, is a culture. Like they can only give what the data gave to them, but in what culture are you, what other workarounds you managed to have for yourself? And

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what is the - you know - the overall way a country behaves also the history it came out. For if we are the last place and - I mean - we would always say like coming from our culture: Yeah, but did you see what's going on in Hungary. I think whatever we have, it's better than there, because starting with Corona, they made some laws, which seems to us from our understanding of the world, very much more oppressive than we have it here with us. Though the transparency thing might not represent that, so it's, again, one indicator and it's not cool that this indicator sees us at the last place, but we shouldn't take these rating things, especially when it comes to ratings

one thing that we always miss is to see it in...

Uhm... we must not see it standing for itself. What is the tradition there? What is the country? What is the culture and what are people doing about it? Like, why can we still be happy if we are the last place? What did we do right? Since the situation seems to be, to put it bluntly, fucked up so. And what? Uhm, so not to say that's good. You know, last place. But we know that from glasfaser [german word for fiber cable]

from our cables, Internet cables, we are last place there as well. So we do get used to these things, uhm but to always say: Context, context, what's the vocabulary I was missing, sorry.

So don't take a rating just because it's a rating and then whine about, oh, we are last place and even this or that country is better. So we think this country is worse than ours, but to see it in a cultural context of the country and then say, what does the other country, which I aspire to be, have better? You know, like as I said before, Wikipedia is the best comparison I can find. It doesn't mean we're all fucked up and we are last place because we are just horrible. It just says that there is a lot to do. But it doesn't say like, you know, if if you were, let's say, South African and you don't know anything about Austria. And you would see this rating, then you would never decide to go to Austria because it looks awful if you have the last place in transparency and he would probably say, oh, my God, even we are better. I would never go to Austria, because if people aren't talking to the government, I mean, how can they be happy people? And so and we would disagree and we would say, yeah, not everything's perfect, but no worries. We do talk to our government and they don't always answer. And they have funny answers sometimes, but we working on it and we are trying to do something better. And but it's not all that bad and it's not the regime they're living in. No worries. You can come visit us, you're welcome please. And we need tourists. And we also have Mozart, so please do come. Umh, so the rating for itself, I think no one would feel represented by it with. Giving: I'm from Austria, so I [41:13] < inaudible > Person in Austria now, given it's the last place. But it is something, again, this puzzle piece where we see like, I don't think we want to be last place. Uhm, we want at least to be in the middle, I think with these questions, especially, governments don't want to be the last place, but they want to be Middlefield. They don't want to be first place either you know it's too transparent for them. But, uhm this indication like:

< sound is off > **Oh, no. What happened? Something.**

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Hmm.

< reconnection sound >

Hello?

Ah! Back again.

Still recording?

Yeah, the recording is not connected to the system

Let's make the TLDR, otherwise you will have too much to transcribe.

Uhm. It's like... the context matters, like... don't take the rating for itself. Look at the context of the countries and how people cope with the situation... uhm... but use it when you say you want in this or that as that, uhm, a real change.

And the last comparison that I made is if you do an SSL test with a website and you are like, oh, I like having an A plus, oh my God, what happened. Sometimes it's just a handshake that's missing or that's not there yet, which isn't the most important thing of all. And it doesn't mean your site is not secure, but it's just missing. And you, like you, were you would be valid to have the A plus and not just the B minus or B, but let's just add it and then you're A plus again.

But if everyone is A plus and you are the B, then everyone is like: Oh my God, it's B, it's insecure , uhm, you don't even know how to do websites! Who are you? Idiot!

And you get like a shit storm. And because no one cared to look into why is the B there? And instead of saying, hey, this handshake really didn't work, make it go away and you're A plus.

So the same thing would be with this rti-rating that, apart from - uhm look there is the first place and there's the last place – You really then have to start looking into the details, which is the first place the first place? Why is the last place the last place.

There is very much.

And coming to the culture as a last example. Uhm, there is countries where the income and also the taxes people pay are transparent to everyone in the country. And they think it's a great model and no one cares. Uhm, if you take this model and put it to Austria, then we would see like: Yeah great, I want to know what our politicians earn and what everyone earns, but I don't want to show them what I'm earning. So perhaps I don't want the system at all because I don't want to show them. And this is probably why we from a cultural experience, we as Austrians, we don't like to talk so much about money and we don't. We are very intransparent, even with friends when it comes to how much do I earn? We must be talking. I earn well or I don't earn very well or it's not enough, stuff like that. But we don't say: I earn so and so much money. We don't do that. It's cultural. So we like the idea that there is a country where they say like: hey, we've got used to that, we don't care. It's nice and it has very many positive effects. If you can go online and see what's your neighbour earning.

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And maybe this is a part of the rating, why other countries are valued higher like the Nordic countries, because they have this tradition and would work with us? I don't think so. So this is why I meant: don't take a rating for itself because it says something, it's like this school rating, we should talk about school ratings like one and five for not succeeded, which doesn't show the shades of talent that young people might have, but. That again, but overall, of course, it's always a good indication if some platform like that indicates you're last place or in the last places like, I don't know 15th from 17 is it better? Uhm to. Dig into that and say, like, how can we make our country better for the people so they feel their questions are answered better and not to say how can we move up in rti-ratings? So I think this is a very important thing to distinguish. Uhm, if we are all happy and we say like: Hey, we get everything we want from our government - who are rti- ratings? they can think whatever they want. If we think, as a country or as a European Union, that's good the way it is. It would never happen that way, of course, but just in theory. If we focus too much on how do we get the perfect rating, then you will trigger the wrong indicators to make it better, which isn't automatically really better in the system it works for the society.

Like, you know, you can fake yourself up in the rating without changing anything. If you say like, we are very transparent, but no one finds the way how to ask questions to the government because it's not working, you get a 404, then it might be the best answer I would get if the site's not working. And I can pose my question, but I would be number one in RTI ratings, to put it bluntly and like... more of a comic style of comparison, but... do not care about how do I get up in the ratings, but do care about how I really do a change. And that's again, where things start with these sites. So I say stay suspicious to these sites, but use them as an indication. Yes.

OK

I think it was complicated, sorry.

Uhm, totally fine, thank you.

Now end remarks to the overall topic. Are there any additional remarks that you would like to make?

Oh, I think I said so much, and I'm sorry that you had to transcribe all of that, so I, I, I mean,... **I will use automatic platforms to help me**

The end remark would logically be what I said in the beginning, that I do think that especially for NGOs, who are dedicated to one topic, might it be climate change, might it be animal rights, might it be human rights, that these frameworks are very important, especially for NGOs who are focussing on one topic and who want to and who have the will and the ability hopefully to dig deeper into that, to get answers to questions they have, to understand the world better or what the government did about a topic they care about.

For if I think something's unfair and noone's there to explain to me why this might not be unfair. But I missed some points that I didn't take into consideration and understanding

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them, it would make more sense and I might still be unhappy, but I would understand that this is some sort of trade I had to do because trade is also what democracy is about. You know, it's not safe all animals and like,... I don't know, have trees die as an exchange.

So I do think that we have to understand that these transparency laws are also needed to not have someone stripped naked so everyone can hate their government, but also to create a form of understanding why decisions are being made in a way that everyone can understand them. And so we need the law that's not very understandable, but to a few persons who usually studied law, provides the possibility for every citizen to get information about topics they care about in a way they know how to access a topic, in a language everyone understands. For, uhm it's not just about a transparency law and I'm thinking into the future, now, not into what is our situation in reality, but the more complex and the more technocrized societies get, the more we have to use the technique we have, to simplify accessibility. Which, you know, companies like Apple know very well how to do, but for all the wrong reasons, but for having us play games or whatsoever. To simplify also the answer is because one tactic to have someone not bothering you with a question you don't want to answer is, to go into a jargon of

a language no one understands, if you are not a lawyer, if you are not an insider, if you don't have studied this field of expertise. So the transparency law itself should be a basis, again, for the European Union in the best case to have a standard, because I don't want to have rti-rating. I tell you as it is, I want to have the European Union to have a standardized model where you can be better and do your RTI ratings, but have no one going below without having to fear consequences.

And so. Having said that, the next step must be providing countries to cover it up with jargon no one understands or, you know, having awful ways to get access to the site, where you can pose your question, but to understand the answer to the question that you have, as soon as we have a voting coming up politicians are very eager to run the streets and to talk to everybody and care about their problems, their daily problems and very down to earth. But the soon as an election goes away, everything gets very uhm... like a monolith, you know, very above, you have a very strange language, very strange things happening. And with these questions, where you want to have a transparency law. They're usually very complex questions anyways, they are not like, why is the sky blue? So it's dedicated people who have serious questions and they want serious answers, but we should make them understandable for the overall public. And this is something we will have to be caring about in the next step anyways, because otherwise society will fall apart and it starts with conspiracies, starts with explainablility, since we are doing this interview at the start of 2021, we see it with demonstrations of very funny kind of synergy's who found themselves with conspiracy theories, with right wing activists, with people who say Corona doesn't even exist.

So how do these three groups even found each other to go together on the streets? And apart from being very excited about conspiracy theories because their own world seems to be very boring, is they didn't find any other expl... And forget the right wing

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activists here. I just take the conspiracy theorists, they didn't find any other explanation for what's going on with Corona, which is very sad.

But and the state they are when they walk the streets, it's not about explaining something to them anymore. They're beyond that. But at the beginning, when they started to look into the topic and what is Corona and what is covid-19 and oh, my God, mutation's whatsoever. They took a wrong path, and the wrong path is because they didn't get an answer that was there but didn't make sense to them.

So this also is something with transparency and to be honest, I think everyone has experienced situations with this virus where we were sitting there and like, this doesn't make sense to me now, why is it like that?

Why is the vaccine? Why can you do right now in Dubai hollidays where you get vaccined? It's vaccine holidays in Dubai. So they don't seem to have a problem with getting this vaccine. And this is the question where you're looking at in your own country and are like, why is my chance in two years that I get the vaccine whilst you have people who are like, oh, my God, no, it's Bill Gates who wants to implant the chip to me because I don't know.

I saw some film in the 1980s that suggested that. So we are diveded as a society and transparency or that possibility to discussion, to discuss and to understand is one, again a puzzle piece, but it's one key element to bring people on a global scale together to understand, because if I don't, I mean, that's the good thing about transparency is if I don't find answers here, I can look to Germany and listen to Mr. Drosten, who explains from his view as a virologist, things.

So my world is big anyways, but who do I trust? We're again in this trust issue thing. And here is transparency, which is standardized the basis for everything we will be facing as a society in the future, might be a virus, might be climate change, might it be how do we go green or might it be Elon Musk and who is allowed to live on Mars if it works.

All these questions have to be based on a standardized thing, but also like, why is the city of Vienna cutting this tree I like so much and can I do something about it? And why does it have to be this old tree that's standing here forever just because of the stupid subway and... all of these questions.

I have to come together. Standardized platform, European Union, since we want to be part of that, since I think it's a great idea and go a bit away from this, let's call them role models, who always... who still think that to symbolize a leadership, you have to have this spirit of - you know - being fighting, like this fighting element, yeah, if you want to say, like I'm a leader, you have to have this fighting element within yourself, which is starting from Alexander the Great, made his way in history where someone who says, I want to be a leader up to the 45th president, Mr. Trump, who did it in a very creative way.

And Mr. Macron also did it when he said "nous sommes en guerre" - we are at war - when describing the virus. So putting out this element of willing to fight but to have the

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same figure, but with the non fighting element, but the rationality and transparency.

In conclusion, we have. jobs to offer for people who do nothing else but explaining to other people why we're doing certain things. This is a future we want, we should want to head towards.

So, yeah, that's the end remark, transparency laws are the start, but we should have done them some years ago actually, because the problems we face won't get less, but, Yeah.

OK, thank you.

You're welcome

During the interview, you said you would prefer to be anonymized, you changed your mind?

Yes, I did.

Yes

Because with being anonymous and not named, I can talk more freely.

Yes I totally understand, I have not on records asked you for your name, Should I also anonymize to organisations you named.

And no, you can say, like... if you say works at... Well, freelance journalist, and if the organisation is important to you, like you want to name the organisation, otherwise, if you see just like ...

The thing is, I will, ideally transcribe everything and, if you would say you would prefer these organisations to be anonymized I would say "Radiostation A from Austria", "Radiostation B from Austria", for example.

Uhum, Ok Yeah.That's perfect, yes.

OK. Then I will do it like this and I will stop the recording. Now.

Great

5.1.5 Date of interview: 8th of febuary 2021 - Alexander Fanta

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Alexander Fanta, Journalist for netzpolitik.org

Thank you for your time. Am I allowed to record this interview?

Yes, please do.

OK, is it OK to name you and your organisation, and if not, I will anonymize your name and your organisation?

Yes, it's fine to do so. OK.

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What is the name of your employer and which countries do you work, which also includes which countries are affected by your work?

So my employer is netzpolitik.org, which is a journalistic organisation devoted to digital rights. I'm a journalist. I'm also the EU correspondent for Let's Put It to Work. So I am usually based in Brussels from where I cover European Union politics, but also anything regarding net politics, mainly in Germany and Austria. But I've, of course, also written about other countries.

OK, I guess I skip the general tasks of your organisation because you already mentioned it.

Is government transparency and state transparency, something you come in touch with your daily or monthly work. And if yes, please describe how.

Yes, in actually several different ways. So for one our organisation sees advocating for government transparency is in its purview, in its advocacy for digital rights. We also use Freedom of Information requests and other government transparency requests for our reporting. So it's a research tool. I personally have made Freedom of Information requests with the European Union, but also with a number of its member states and a couple of countries outside of the European Union. I've recently even tried to do a FOIA request with the World Bank. So, yeah, I use Freedom of information requests, access to documents, requests quite frequently in my work.

OK, can you specify? Which which countries you have worked with this Freedom of Information Acts and on which level?

Yeah, so as I said, I have done Freedom of Information requests with the European Commission, also with the European Council and the European Parliament, those being the three EU institutions that allow such requests, as you might or might not know, the European court does not allow such requests. I've also made Freedom of Information requests in Austria. As far as the Austrian law makes that possible. It's very delicate.

Germany, Denmark, Ireland. Norway, I think Sweden, um. Belgium and the Netherlands, I believe. Um. Austria, the US.

Um. And. Am I missing any countries? Possibly Hungary.

OK, thank you.

What are your experiences with the right to information laws?

So I think it's a mixed bag. Speaking as a journalist and as a citizen, I think that it can be a very powerful tool to hold governments to account, to obtain information that is interesting not only to myself, fellow campaigners and journalists, but also to a broader public.

My personal experience is I have done multiple stories based on Freedom of Information requests, so it has been quite successful in the respect that I was able to, in many cases, to obtain information. However, in many other cases, my requests hit a brick wall.

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So we are speaking about what I perceive as wilful cases of obstruction by the institutions to release information.

Yeah, and so I've made many appeals to freedom of information requests. However, I have never gone to court to enforce my rights, which I see is something I probably should have done in some cases.

Thank you.

What are key aspects that you believe, have to be part of a right to information / transparency law?

So I think it's very important you have outside review, so outside of the institution that the request is being sent to and this outside review body can make binding decisions.

I think that is that is a key requirement because as soon as you have a, you know, incorrect interpretation of the access of information law by the institution that the request is being sent to, you need some way to correct it.

And judicial remedy is, of course, a possibility in most jurisdictions, but that always requires copious resources from the person making the request. So if I disagree with the commission on their rejecting my request, I would have to go to the European Court of Justice, which is quite a high hurdle to change that. And this is something that the European Parliament has mentioned in a resolution it is said to pass this week is that there needs to be a possibility for the redress that doesn't involve going to court, but still can produce a binding decision. So. In the European Union, the European Ombudsman is somebody you can appeal to and he can give his legal opinion, however, that opinion is not binding. I guess in my view it should be.

Since the last question was was more meant in general, and I'm excusing myself for this. My next question would be which of these aspects are currently missing to you and on which legislative level? But you already mentioned what aspects are missing to you.

I can take say a couple of more things that are that are missing in my view. I think that very often the laws don't go far enough in what areas they put up for scrutiny.

So very often, lawmakers exempt current ongoing decision making processes from the law, which I think is <beep sound>

Which is what? There was an audio problem?

Matters of ongoing discussion. So if a law is not yet passed, lawmakers will frequently say they will not hand out any information regarding that to leave them space to think, the european institutions especially are hiding the opinions in member states on laws currently in preparation, as well as laws passed from the public. So that is a huge blind spot.

And, it's another point, yeah. Internal security matters. So very often you talk about stuff that pertains to the security. Security, home affairs, that kind of thing. It's out of

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bounds even then when transparency disclosure is potentially, you know, it's potentially a positive effect for security

So to give an example, the European institutions are refusing to release information on systems, of confidential messaging systems they use to exchange confidential information, even what type of software is involved and who the contract is with.

So in some ways, they are endorsing the concept of security by obscurity, by not releasing that information.

You have mentioned you also have worked with the Austrian Auskunftspflichtgesetz. What positive, neutral and negative experience did you make?

So I have only made. I think two or maybe three of these requests under the law, because, maybe because it is seen by a broad range of journalists and campaigners as not very effective. My own experience, the first request I made a couple of years back wasn't answered at all, in some ways a very negative experience. However, more recently, I tried again and I do remember actually getting a reply of substance, however, as I understand it, the Austrian law requires authorities to answer to queries. It does, however, not seem to give the rights, even grant the right to see any documents and as people in this case know the law, its most severe restriction is that it doesn't actually mandate transparency. It just gives the authorities the potential possibility to release information when they feel like it. So this is a significant weakness of the law.

Thank you.

Which frameworks for right to information requests or transparency requests do you use?

So I use the European Union laws, it's regulation 10 49 2001.

I've also.

I believe made requests based on the I think it's the arhous convention on access to information and especially environmental information and the appropriate German laws.

And, you know, other FOI laws in various jurisdictions, I usually just look up the legal basis whenever I'm attempting to make the request, I'm not a legal scholar, I just kind of use the tools as I understand them.

But but do you use technical frameworks or do you just send the request by email?

Yes, I more often than not use platforms like asktheeu.org , fragdenstaat.at and fragdenstaat.de . Only, mainly I think, only if one of these tools is not available I would try to either use a form provided by the institution or just send an email. But I've done it also a number of times.

OK

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I'm sorry if this question's kind of double. Do these frameworks play a role for you when doing data research or conducting, right to information requests?

Yeah, I think they're very useful, important, especially for structuring information received. It's a great way to keep an overview of what answers I have already received. It's very helpful.

Can you name all the frameworks you know?

I already mentioned like asktheeu.org , fragdenstaat.at and fragdenstaat.de whatdotheyknow in the UK, I have used that one.

And I'm aware that there is a piece of open source code that allows creating further sites called Alaveteli. I have visited an Alaveteli conference even, and I've met I think people from at least 10 or 15 European countries that run such sites. So I think there's quite a few.

What are the positive aspects of those frameworks, which features do you like and what are the negative aspects of those frameworks? Which features are missing?

So perhaps the most helpful is is making batch requests, so I sent the same request to numerous, for instance, directorates general within the European Commission. I've also used that, for instance, to make requests with authorities in all 16 German regions. So that has been quite helpful.

And in general, just providing legal language kind of out of the box is super. What I would wish for is: Very often I make very detailed appeals to the public bodies and there, then I will have two books on the transparency, the European Union and Freedom of Information access in the European Union. So I will rifle through those books to find case law to support my appeal. And very often I think that all of this information that is relevant is already somewhere there, and the people who set up these framework sites usually have that information already. So to give an example. The EU law has I think it has four exceptions, like four types of exceptions, so it's Article four, one, two, three, four, and then there's maybe A and B. So I think there is maybe a total of, you know, 10 or 12 different exceptions to freedom of information that the EU Commission and council and parliament use to refuse requests. So when the only... when there are kind of... the the piano playing has only 12 keys.

What I would want is for each sound that they're making, that the software offers me a standard case law which I could use to counter the exception, say you you're saying that under Article four one, the confidentiality of international negotiations, you're saying I can't receive this information, then I want to have be offered three cases at the ECJ where the ECJ rejected or kind of overruled or gave a way around that exception. That would be very helpful.

Thank you Could you decide for one specific framework that should be the standard framework for you on a country level? And if yes, which one?

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So fragdenstaat.de I use for all my german requests, it's a very well-made platform. Yeah. And you can also use it for EU request, which makes it quite universally helpful.

Do you know, uh, www.rti-rating.org.

No.

OK. Then I can skip this part

End remarks, do you have any additional remarks that you would like to make?

Yeah, I think there needs to be a lot more public education about the possibilities of freedom of information requests, even amongst journalists, they are not widely used. I think that's a shame. I think that using these requests and

the base public knowledge for all, and yeah, I think overall increasing the access in more countries, countries like Austria that have traditionally a very top down culture of governance is generally a good idea.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. If you like, I will send you the transcript once it is ready.

5.1.6 Date of interview: 9th of February 2021 - Barbara Wimmer - Original (English below)

The original interviewing language was German, should there be any differences in meaning the German version is to be used before the English one.

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Barbara Wimmer

Darf ich dieses Interview aufzeichnen?

Ja.

Ich werde eine Abschrift machen – automatisiert - und werde den Inhalt für meine Masterarbeit verwenden, falls das okay ist.

Ja

Passt.

Ist es in Ordnung? Sie und Ihre Organisation zu nennen. Wenn nicht, werde ich den Namen und oder Ihre Organisation anonymisieren.

Okay, also ich der Name nennen ist okay, die Organisation bitte anonymisieren. Also der Beruf Journalist darf vorkommen oder Journalistin. Also mein Beruf. Natürlich gerne. Aber die Organisation, für die ich schreibe, bitte nicht

Sehr gut passt. Ja, dann wird es so sein.

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In welchen Ländern arbeiten Sie? Was auch beinhaltet: Welche Länder sind von ihrer Arbeit betroffen? z.B. Arbeiten in Deutschland, aber auch auf EU-Ebene. Können Sie die allgemeinen Aufgaben der Organisation nennen für die sie arbeiten?

Ja, also ich bin Journalistin für ein österreichisches Medienhaus und unsere Plattform spricht an und für sich, vor allem das österreichische Publikum an, ist aber natürlich wie alle Internetplattformen auch in anderen Ländern erreichbar und verfügbar und es wird auch vor allem im gesamten Dach Raum gelesen, also Deutschland, Österreich, Deutschland, Schweiz.

Ich selbst als Journalistin schreibe vor allem über Technologie und Netzpolitik und das ist natürlich ein sehr internationales Feld.

Das heißt, meine Berichte betrifft nicht nur Österreich und Behörden in Österreich z.B., sondern ich schreibe auch sehr viel über die EU-Ebene oder über andere Länder und Technologien und so..

Danke!

Ist Regierungs und staatliche Transparenz etwas, mit dem Sie in Ihrer täglichen oder monatlichen Arbeit in Berührung kommen und wenn ja, beschreiben Sie bitte, wie.

Ja, also ich komm täglich - ich komm fast täglich mit Regierungen, und zwar vor allem der österreichischen Regierung und hier vor allem Bundesebene in Kontakt, und zwar wir berichten auch sehr häufig über Erkenntnisse, die in Zusammenhang mit der Coronavirus Pandemie stehen. Und diesbezüglich bin ich sehr häufig mit Ministerien wie dem Gesundheitsministerium in Kontakt, aber auch andere Behörden und Ministerien, zum Beispiel dem Innenministerium. Das Innenministerium ist ja sehr viel für Grundrechte zuständig. Mit dem bin ich auch regelmäßig in Kontakt und auch mit dem Verkehrsministerium weil Verkehr und Technologie gehört in Österreich auch zusammen. Und mit den drei Ministerien bin ich hauptsächlich in Kontakt, habe aber eigentlich schon alle durch, also alle Ministerien hatte ich schon mal.

Manchmal ist es auch so, dass ich mit Ländern, also mit Behörden auf Länderebene in Kontakt treten muss. Und wenn ich all diese Institutionen nenne, sind‘s in dem Falle vorrangig die Pressestellen dieser Institutionen plus in weiterer Folge dann halt direkt mit den Ministerinnen und Ministern oder mit den Beamtinnen und Beamten.

Danke

Haben Sie mit Gesetzen auf regionaler Landes oder EU-Ebene gearbeitet, die Zugang zu Informationen der öffentlichen Hand ermöglichen? (Recht auf Information)

Ja, bei der Frage bin ich mir nicht ganz sicher, was gemeint ist. Geht es da um das Informationsfreiheitsgesetz und die IT Gesetze oder geht es da um generelle Gesetze?

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Also das Feedback hatte ich auch schon einmal und ich hab die Frage leider nicht umformuliert. Es geht darum, ob ob schon Anträge, Anfragen - also ob aufgrund von Informationsfreiheitsgesetz Anfragen gestellt worden sind, also in der Form damit gearbeitet. Also ich habe die Frage bewusst allgemein gestaltet, damit Leute, die Anträge bearbeiten, diese Frage auf sich beziehen können und auch Leute, die Anfragen einbringen.

Okay, gut, kenn mich aus. Also bei meinen Medienanfragen beziehe ich mich meistens nicht auf das Informationsfreiheitsgesetz, sondern stelle die Fragen in meiner Rolle als Journalistin zuerst mal ganz ohne FOIA Anfrage.

OK

Und ob ich in der Vergangenheit schon mal eine FOIA Anfrage als FOIA Anfrage gestellt habe, kann ich so dezidiert nicht beantworten, weil mir jetzt akut keine in Erinnerung ist. Aber möglich ist es. Und wenn man jetzt zum Beispiel.

Nein, also die Datenschutz Auskunfts Anfragen, die fallen ja nicht darunter.

Nein

Nein. Okay, gut passt.

Gut, wenn das nicht in Erinnerung ist, kann ich auch nicht die Frage stellen: Was sind Ihre Erfahrungen mit Recht auf Informations EU-Gesetzen?

Dann überspringe ich das.

Was sind die wichtigsten Aspekte, die in einem Transparenzgesetz Informationsfreiheitsgesetz enthalten sein müssen?

Und Folgefrage wär: Welche, diese Aspekte fehlen ihnen derzeit und auf welcher Gesetzes Ebene.

Ja, also meiner Meinung nach sollte es so wenig Ausnahmen wie möglich bzw. gar keine Ausnahmen geben, vor allem nicht Ausnahmen, die mit Datenschutz unter Anführungszeichen begründet werden, weil der Datenschutz ist bei den meisten Anfragen nicht das Problem, wird aber sehr oft derzeit verwendet, wenn es um solche Anfragen geht als Ausrede. Also das gehört dringend abgeschafft. Und deswegen braucht es so wenig Ausnahmeregelungen da drinnen wie möglich, damit das Recht auf Auskunft tatsächlich größer wird.

Und dann braucht man auf jeden Fall auch einen Informationsbeauftragten, der wirklich da vermitteln kann, wenn irgendwelche Unklarheiten sind.

Ich hab gerade gesehen, ich habe eine Frage ausgelassen. Die Gründe.

Die Gründe, warum haben sie noch keine Freiheit Informationsfreiheit Anfragen gemacht ?

Also im Journalismus ist es eigentlich so, also ich bin mit diesen ganzen Ministeriums Stellen und Pressestellen in Kontakt, war‘s bisher in meiner Arbeit, so dass ich bis zum

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Jahr 2020 eigentlich von allen Behörden auf all meine Fragen tatsächlich Antworten erhalten habe. Ich sage nicht, dass es immer perfekte Antworten waren. Manchmal haben sich die Behörden natürlich drumherum gedrückt und versucht mit Larifari Stellungnahmen sich dem Thema zu entziehen und dachten sich schon der Journalist oder die Journalistin wird schon glücklich sein damit. Dann kamen halt Nachfragen. Die wurden dann entweder beantwortet oder nicht beantwortet. Aber eigentlich habe ich bis zum Jahr 2020 in meiner mehr als 15 jährigen Journalisten Laufbahn bisher eigentlich von allen Behörden Antworten bekommen. Deswegen war es einfach bis zu diesem Zeitpunkt nicht notwendig. 2020 hat sich aber einiges verändert. Mit der Pandemie kam‘s tatsächlich dazu, dass überhaupt keine Deadlines, die man mitgegeben hatte, mehr eingehalten worden sind und man einfach gar keine Antworten bekommen hat. Und das betraf aber quer durch die Bank wirklich alle Ministerien, vom Innenministerium bis zum Gesundheitsministerium. Es wurden Journalistenanfragen einfach nicht mehr beantwortet. Und mehrere Anfragen sind eigentlich tatsächlich komplett offen geblieben. Z.B. Habe ich ganz konkret eine Anfrage wirklich mehrfach gestellt und das war die nach der Position Österreichs zum Thema Verschlüsselung. Ich war insgesamt bei sechs verschiedenen Ministerien, bis sich herausgestellt hat, dass das Innenministerium dafür zuständig ist.

Dann habe ich die Frage, wie denn die Position Österreichs zum Thema Verschlüsselung sich gestaltet, dem Innenministerium gestellt und zwar insgesamt acht Mal und ich habe bis heute keine Auskunft erteilt bekommen.

Eigentlich müsste das meine erste Recht auf Auskunft Anfrage sein, weil da bin ich total gescheitert mit meinen bisherigen Journalismusmethoden. Beim Gesundheitsministerium war es einfach so hingegen, dass man eine Anfrage gemacht hat und einfach tagelang nichts gehört hat.

Das dann über die APA irgendwie oder über die Austria Presseagentur genau das Thema dann irgendwie zwei Tage später plötzlich beantwortet wurde, was man eigentlich schon selber seit drei Tagen irgendwie versucht hat herauszufinden.

Das habe ich generell im letzten Jahr bei sehr vielen Behörden gemerkt, dass sie die Vorgangsweise, wie sie mit Medien umgehen, komplett geändert haben. Früher hat jeder Journalist und jede Journalistin Antworten bekommen. Jetzt ist es so, dass alles über die Austria Presse Agentur gespielt wird und teilweise auf den Pressekonferenzen man sich Voranmelden muss und nicht mehr so leicht Plätze kriegt und nicht zu viele Leute zugelassen werden können. Das heißt, die Corona Krise hat die ganze Mediensituation komplett verändert. Und eigentlich bedeutet das, dass solche Anfragen also FOIA Anfragen, jetzt tatsächlich eine viel größere Rolle spielen müssen, weil sich die Kommunikation so verändert hat.

Ok

Welche Frameworks für Transparenzanfragen oder Informationsfreiheitsgesetzanfragen benutzen sie?

Na ja, keine.

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Noch! Sagen wir noch keine.

Wobei. Also geht's da jetzt also was? Wobei ich mich gefragt habe Was ist ein Framework in dem Fall?

Webseiten

Fragdenstaat.at zum Beispiel?

Zum Beispiel Fragdenstaat.at, das halt Privat gemacht wird oder auch die Transparenzdatenbanken des Bundes oder auch die Transparenzdatenbank der EU oder diverse andere Frameworks wie whatdotheyknow. Sie fragen mich gerade eine Frage, die ich später stellen wollte.

Ja. Nein. Also das macht nix. Also mir persönlich bekannt ist. Ich kann sie gleich beantworten. Mir persönlich bekannt ist fragdenstaat.at und fragdenstaat.de und die Transparenzdatenbank der EU muss ich sagen, die kenne ich zwar. Also ja, die kenne ich auch. Aber sie ist für meine Arbeit bisher nicht zwingend notwendig gewesen, sag ich jetzt mal!

Gut, ich überspringe die Fragen zu den positiven und negativen Aspekten dieser Frameworks, die Sie nicht benutzen.

Können Sie sich für ein bestimmtes Framework entscheiden, dass Sie das für Sie auf Landesebene das Standard Framework sein sollte? Wenn ja, welches?

Ja, also für Privatbürger hätte ich gesagt, fragtdenstaat.at .

Für Organisationen und für Journalisten bin ich mir nicht sicher, ob das wirklich das Standard Framework sein sollte? Mir fallen jetzt aber keine anderes ein.

OK

Kennen sie rti-rating.org?

Ja

Okay, können sie einen Gesamteindruck von den dort bereitgestellten Informationen geben?

Ja, also so wie ich das verstehe, ist es ja das Länder Ranking wie einzelne Länder bei der Informationsfreiheit derzeit abschneiden. Und ich finde das zwar interessant um, aber in meiner Arbeit spielt auch das nur eine untergeordnete Rolle, weil ich vor allem Informationen aus Österreich brauche und wir da eben sowieso an wirklich schlechter schlechter Stelle stehen. Und das Ranking schlüsselt einfach auf warum.

Also natürlich, wenn man wissen will, wie sein eigenes Land dasteht mit Informationsfreiheit ist das auf jeden Fall eine gute, seriöse Plattform.

Genau. Nennen Sie positive und negative Aspekte dieser Website und den bereitgestellten Informationen. Falls sie etwas ergänzen möchten wäre das der Zeitpunkt.

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Na danke. Also aus dem Kopf heraus nichts.

Gibt es weitere Anmerkungen zum generellen Thema, die sie machen möchten ?

Ja, also ich finde natürlich, dass Österreich, weil wir wirklich ganz schlecht abschneiden und sämtliche Regierungen der letzten Jahre uns immer wieder ein Informationsfreiheitsgesetz versprechen. Und ja, wir haben jetzt eine Corona Pandemie ab und dadurch hat sich das bereits schon wieder in der Regierung verzögert. Aber meine persönlichen Erfahrungen als Journalistin zeigen, dass es genau jetzt wirklich, da wirklich wichtige und dringende Zeitpunkt ist, dass wir endlich in Österreich ein besseres Informationsfreiheitsgesetz bekommen, damit solche Situationen wie bei den Medienanfragen, die ich vorher geschildert habe, so nicht mehr stehenbleiben können.

Ok Danke

Wenn es das war, war‘s das?

Ja

Dann stoppe ich das Interview.

5.1.7 Date of interview: 9th of febuary 2021 - Barbara Wimmer - Translation into English

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Barbara Wimmer

May I record this interview?

Yes.

I will make a transcript - automated - and will use the content for my master’s thesis, if that’s okay.

Yes

Fits.

Is it okay? To name you and your organisation. If not, I will anonymize the name and or your organisation.

Okay, so I name the name is okay, anonymize the organisation please. So the profession journalist may occur or journalist. So my profession. Of course with pleasure. But the organisation for which I write, please not

Very well fits. Yes, then it will be like that.

In which countries do you work? Which includes: Which countries are affected by your work? e.g. Working in Germany, but also at EU level. Can you name the general tasks of the organisation you work for?

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Yes, so I am a journalist for an Austrian media house and our platform addresses in and of itself, mainly the Austrian audience, but of course like all internet platforms it is also accessible and available in other countries and it is also read mainly in the whole roof area, so Germany, Austria, Germany, Switzerland.

As a journalist myself, I write primarily about technology and network policy, and that is of course a very international field.

That means my reports are not only about Austria and authorities in Austria for example, but I also write a lot about the EU level or about other countries and technologies and so on.

Thank you!

Is government and government transparency something you come in contact with in your daily or monthly work and if so, please describe how.

Yes, so I come daily - I come almost daily in contact with governments, and especially the Austrian government and here especially federal level, and namely we also report very often on findings that are related to the coronavirus pandemic. And in this regard, I am very often in contact with ministries such as the Ministry of Health, but also other authorities and ministries, for example the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of the Interior is very much responsible for fundamental rights. I am also in regular contact with the Ministry of Transport, because transport and technology belong together in Austria. And I'm mainly in contact with the three ministries, but I've actually been through all of them, so I've had all the ministries before.

Sometimes it is also the case that I have to get in touch with the federal states, i.e. with authorities at the federal state level. And when I mention all these institutions, in this case it's primarily the press offices of these institutions, plus then subsequently directly with the ministers or with the civil servants.

Thank you

Have you worked with laws at the regional state or EU level that allow access to public information? (Right to Information)

Yes, I'm not quite sure what is meant by that question. Is that about the freedom of information law and IT laws or is that about general laws?

Also I had the feedback before and I didn't rephrase the question unfortunately. It is about whether requests, inquiries - that is, whether requests have been made on the basis of the Freedom of Information Act, so in the form worked with it. So I deliberately made the question general, so that people who process requests can relate this question to themselves and also people who submit requests.

Okay, good, know my stuff. So in my media requests, I usually don't refer to the Freedom of Information Act, but I ask the questions in my role as a journalist first without a FOIA request at all.

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OK

And whether I have ever made a FOIA request as a FOIA request in the past, I can't answer that decisively because I don't acutely remember any now. But it is possible. And if one now for example.

No, so the data protection information requests, they do not fall under it.

No

No. Okay, good fits.

Well, if that is not remembered, I can't ask the question either: What are your experiences with right to information EU laws?

Then I'll skip that.

What are the most important aspects that must be included in a transparency law Freedom of Information Law?

And follow-up question would be: which, these aspects are they currently missing and at what level of law. And follow-up question would be: Which, these aspects are missing them currently and on which law level.

Yes, so in my opinion there should be as few exceptions as possible or no exceptions at all, especially not exceptions that are justified with data protection under quotation marks, because data protection is not the problem with most requests, but it is very often used at the moment when it comes to such requests as an excuse. So that needs to be abolished urgently. And that's why we need as few exceptions as possible in order to actually increase the right to information.

And then, in any case, we also need an information officer who can really mediate if there are any ambiguities.

I just saw, I left out one question. Reasons.

Are there reasons why you haven't done freedom of information requests yet ?

So in journalism it's actually like, so I'm in contact with all these ministry offices and press offices, it's been so far in my work, so I've actually received answers to all my questions from all the authorities until 2020. I'm not saying that they were always perfect answers. Sometimes, of course, the authorities have shirked the issue and tried to avoid the topic with falderal statements, thinking that the journalist will be happy with it. Then came just inquiries. They were either answered or not answered. But actually, in my more than 15-year career as a journalist, I have received answers from all authorities up to the year 2020. That's why it was simply not necessary up to that point. In 2020, however, things changed. With the pandemic, it actually happened that no deadlines that had been given were met at all, and you simply didn't get any answers at all. This affected all ministries, from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of

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Health. Journalists' inquiries were simply no longer answered. And several inquiries actually remained completely open. For example, I asked one specific question several times, and that was about Austria's position on encryption. I went to a total of six different ministries until it turned out that the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for this.

Then I asked the Ministry of the Interior what Austria's position on encryption was, a total of eight times, and to this day I have not received any information.

Actually, this should be my first right to information request, because I totally failed with my previous journalistic methods. With the Ministry of Health, on the other hand, it was simply the case that you made an inquiry and heard nothing for days.

Then, somehow via the APA or the Austria Press Agency, exactly the topic was suddenly answered two days later, which you had actually been trying to find out yourself for three days.

In general, I have noticed in the last year that many authorities have completely changed the way they deal with the media. In the past, every journalist got answers. Now everything is done through the Austria Press Agency, and sometimes you have to register in advance for the press conferences, and it's no longer easy to get seats, and not too many people can be admitted. That is, the Corona crisis has completely changed the whole media situation. And actually that means that such requests so FOIA requests, now actually have to play a much bigger role because communication has changed so much.

Ok

What frameworks for transparency requests or Freedom of Information Act requests do they use?

Well, none.

Yet. Let's say none yet.

Whereas. So there's something going on now? Whereby I asked myself What is a framework in this case?

websites

Fragdenstaat.at for example?

For example Fragdenstaat.at, which is done privately or also the transparency databases of the federal government or also the transparency database of the EU or various other frameworks like whatdotheyknow. You are just asking me a question that I was going to ask later.

Yes. No. So that doesn't matter. So I am personally aware of it. I can answer it right now. I personally know fragdenstaat.at and fragdenstaat.de and the transparency database of the EU, I have to say, I know it. So yes, I know it too. But it has not been

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absolutely necessary for my work so far, I say now! **Good, I'll skip the questions about the positive and negative aspects of these frameworks that you don't use.**

Can you decide on a particular framework that you think should be the default framework for you at the country level? If yes, which one?

Yes, so for private citizens I would have said asksdenstaat.at .

For organisations and for journalists, I'm not sure if that should really be the default framework? I can't think of any others right now though.

OK

Do you know rti-rating.org?

Yes

OK, can you give an overall impression of the information provided there?

Yeah, so as I understand it, yes, it's the country ranking of how individual countries are doing on freedom of information right now. And I find that interesting, but in my work it only plays a minor role, because I mainly need information from Austria and we are in a really bad position anyway. And the ranking simply breaks down why.

So of course, if you want to know how your own country is doing with freedom of information, this is definitely a good, serious platform.

Exactly. List the positive and negative aspects of this website and the information provided. If they want to add something this would be the time.

Well thank you. So off the top of my head nothing.

Are there any other comments on the general topic they would like to make ?

Yes, so of course I think that Austria, because we are really doing quite badly and all the governments in the last few years keep promising us a freedom of information law. And yes, we now have a Corona pandemic off and this has already delayed this again in the government. But my personal experience as a journalist shows that it is exactly now really, there really important and urgent time that we finally get in Austria a better freedom of information law, so that such situations as with the media inquiries, which I have described before, so no longer can stand.

Ok thank you

If that's it, that's it?

Yes

Then I'll stop the interview.

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5.1.8 Date of interview: 10th of febuary 2021 - Thomas Rupprecht - Original (English below)

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Thomas Rupprecht

Vielen Dank, dass Sie sich die Zeit genommen haben, meine Masterarbeit zu unterstützen. Ich werde gleich mit einigen organisatorischen Fragen beginnen. Darf ich dieses Interview aufzeichnen?

Ja.

Vielen Dank!

Ist es in Ordnung, Sie und Ihre Organisation zu nennen? Wenn nicht, werde ich Ihren Namen und oder Ihre Organisation anonymisieren.

Meine Organisation hat eigentlich mit den Anfragen wenig zu tun deswegen würde ich bitten, die Organisation wegzulassen.

Ist in Ordnung.

Darf ich fragen, was Sie beruflich machen und in welchen Ländern Sie arbeiten?

Ich bin seit acht Jahren Webentwickler, programmier diverseste Web-Projekte und mein Arbeitgeber ist in Österreich. Aber die Projekte sind teilweise auch für andere Kontinente.

Ist Regierungs und Staats Transparenz etwas, mit dem Sie in ihrer täglichen oder monatlichen Arbeit oder oder als private Beschäftigung in Berührung kommen? Falls ja beschreiben Sie bitte wie.

Kommt eigentlich nur als Privatinteresse vor.

In letzter Zeit eher weniger, aber in früheren Zeiten, also sagen wir vor fünf Jahren, habe ich schon einige Anfragen gestellt bzw. auch immer wieder recherchiert, was es für andere Anfragen schon gegeben hat und wieder die Antworten sind. Et cetera.

Und haben Sie da mit Hilfe von Gesetzen auf Regionaler, Landes oder EU-Ebene gearbeitet, die Zugang zu Informationen der öffentlichen Hand ermöglichen?

Also bei den Anfangen, die ich selbst gestellt habe, habe ich mit dem niederösterreichischen Auskunftspflichtgesetz und dem österreichischen Auskunftspflichtgesetz gearbeitet.

Was sind denn Ihre Erfahrungen mit diesen Auskunftspflichtgesetzen jeweils auch regional bezogen?

Also bei mir war es eigentlich relativ positiv von den Anfragen, die ich gestellt hab. Also ich habe eigentlich immer eine Antwort bekommen. Bis auf einmal eigentlich auch immer

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eine zufriedenstellende Antwort bekommen. Das eine Mal war halt eine Anfrage an ans Bundesministerium für Inneres.

Und da ist dann halt wieder bezüglich Sicherheit des Staates oder so abgelehnt worden die Anfrage. Aber so im Großen und Ganzen hat‘s bei mir eigentlich keine Probleme gegeben, auch wenn ich schon genug mitbekommen habe, dass unsere Gesetze zu lasch eigentlich sind, damit man die wirklich interessanten Sachen rausbekommen kann, dass sie nicht ablehnen. Das einzige Negative ist vielleicht, dass die meisten Anfragen sich die Behörden relativ lange Zeit gelassen und die Frist ziemlich ausgenutzt haben.

Was sind denn die wichtigsten Aspekte, die Ihrer Meinung nach in einem Transparenzgesetz oder Informationsfreiheitsgesetz enthalten sein müssen?

Erstens einmal was man eigentlich alles anfragen darf und dass es nicht zu schwammig formuliert ist, dass die Behörden jede Kleinigkeit gleich wieder ablehnen können zu irgendeinem ein bisschen kritischeren Thema, also das wirklich ganz genau definiert sein muss, welche Dinge nicht rein fallen. Und diese Dinge sollten aber auch nicht zu viele sein. Also wirklich wo’s um Sicherheit des Staates und so geht ja, aber der Rest eher nicht. Dann natürlich die Fristen. Dass die nicht zu lange sind, weil wenn man jetzt irgendein wichtiges Thema hat - nach einem Jahr ist das Thema interessant und dann sind wir schon wieder beim zehnten weiteren Thema. Und dann die Kosten, dass jetzt keine Kosten für den Bürger anfallen oder wenn, dann geringe Kosten. Wenn zum Beispiel jetzt wirklich die die Antwort bedeuten würde, wir müssen jetzt 10 000 Seiten ausdrucken, wobei in der heutigen Zeit ausdrucken auch keine gute Ausrede mehr ist und was noch? Irgendwas gibt‘s sicher noch, aber das fällt mir gerade nicht mehr ein.

Eventuell ist die Frage redundant. Welche dieser Aspekte fehlen ihnen derzeit und auf welcher Gesetzesebene?

Ähm naja fehlen - für mich selber hat jetzt eigentlich keins davon gefehlt.

Nur waren halt meine Anfragen, die ich gestellt hab jetzt auch nicht so die kritischen bis auf die eine an das Bundesministerium für Inneres.

Die find ich, habe ich zum Beispiel nicht so kritisch gefunden, dass man da gleich gar keine Informationen herausrückt, weiß nicht, ob jetzt gleich interessant ist um welches Thema es das gegangen ist, ob ich das auch erzählen soll.

Ähm also gerne, gerne darüber reden.

Ok, es war eine Anfrage bezüglich stillen SMS und IMSI Catcher, also wie oft es im Jahr vom BMI genutzt wurde und oder ob es überhaupt genutzt wurde. Und ja, als Antwort ist wirklich nur gekommen: Wir geben hier keine Informationen aus Staatsschutzgründen.

Aber sonst von den anderen Aspekt hab ich jetzt keine Probleme gehabt, aber ich hab schon genug mitbekommen, wo kritischere Anfragen gestellt worden sind und dann halt gleich wieder auf die Amtsverschwiegenheit berufen worden ist und dadurch eigentlich das ganze Gesetz nicht den Sinn erfüllt.

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Also es ist ja schon ein bisschen ausgeführt, aber: Welche positiven, negativen oder neutralen Erfahrungen haben sie gemacht mit Auskunftspflichtgesetzen?

Naja, eigentlich habe ich diese wichtige Sache eh schon aufgezählt. Vielleicht eins: Bei einer Anfrage meiner eigenen Gemeinde oder eigentlich bei drei Anfragen meiner eigenen Gemeinde bin ich dann persönlich sogar vom Bürgermeister angerufen worden zu einem persönlichen Gespräch. Da konnte ich auch ein paar Missverständnisse aufklären und hab dadurch nach nach einiger Diskussion auch eine Anfrage zum Beispiel zurückgezogen und hab die, nicht öffentlich gemacht, sondern nur persönlich erhalten. Und nicht jetzt offiziell über die Anfrage. Sonst...

Bewerten Sie das negativ, positiv oder neutral?

Äh ja, ich sage mal.

Es ist schon ein bisschen begründet gewesen. Es war jetzt nicht sowas heikles dass man sagt Okay, das sollte man schon unbedingt veröffentlichen. Und wenn ich es nicht wollen hätte, dann hätte ich es ja trotzdem veröffentlicht. Also das war schon dann meine eigene Einsicht und nicht jetzt unbedingt der Druck von der Behörde. Dass ich jetzt da persönlich angerufen worden bin könnte vielleicht für einige Leute auch Einschüchterung sein. Für mich selber war das jetzt auf jeden Fall nicht.

Für mich war es eigentlich mehr ein: Ok, die Gemeinde hat noch nie Erfahrung gehabt mit solchen Anfragen, die haben nicht einmal gewusst, was da jetzt genau abgeht, weil ich über fragdenstaat die Anfrage gestellt hab und ja, ich hab dann zumindest mal ein bisschen aufgeklärt, wie was wann das bedeutet und so. Und ich finde, von derer Seite aus war es wahrscheinlich auch gar nicht so schlecht für die Gemeinde selbst, das einmal auch erklärt zu bekommen, um was es hier eigentlich geht.

Wobei halt wie gesagt die meisten sich wahrscheinlich davon eher einschüchtern lassen und dann vielleicht die Anzeige gleich zurückziehen. Also kam man in beide Richtungen positiv und negativ sehen.

Danke

Welche Frameworks für Informationsfreiheitsanfragen oder Transparenzrecherchen nutzen sie?

Also persönlich habe ich immer nur fragdenstaat.at verwendet. Ich kenn noch, dass es das gleiche für Deutschland mit fragdenstaat.de auch gibt.

Und ich glaube, das zählt dann aber nicht mehr zu Informationsfreiheitsanfragen oder ich weiß nicht, wie man das genau dazu zählt, verklagdenstaat, also das wäre die nächste Stufe wenn der Bescheid abgelehnt worden ist und man den Bescheid bekommt, dass man den nachher einklagt. Ob das jetzt auch direkt dazugehört? Also weitere direkte Portale kenne ich irgendwie jetzt nicht.

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Ich weiß nur z.B., dass die Wikipedia oder die Wikimedia, weiß nicht wer jetzt die offizielle Organisation ist, Transparenzklagen auch finanziell unterstützt, die für die Wikipedia interessant sind.

Aber jetzt von direkt weiteren Portalen weiß ich jetzt nicht. Ich hab glaube ich gehört, dass es sowas wie fragdenstaat auf EU-Ebene gibt, aber benutzt und angeschaut oder so hab ich's noch nicht.

Was sind die positiven Aspekte von diesen Portalen und welche Eigenschaften gefallen Ihnen?

Erstens einmal: Man kann die Behörden oder die Organisationen, die man dann anfragen will, einmal relativ einfach finden. Man muss jetzt nicht die Email-Adressen et cetera im Internet recherchieren. Man hat einen guten Überblick, ob eine Anfrage schon einmal gestellt worden ist, damit man nicht die gleiche Anfrage noch einmal stellt, was ja oft als Begründung herangezogen wird von den Behörden, dass ein Auskunftspflichtgesetz oder Transparenzgesetz zu viel Aufwand ist für die Behörden.

Man kann einige statistische Daten sicher anschauen, wie positiv oder wieviele positive erledigte oder negative erledigte Anfragen pro Behörde es gibt.

Dass man dann auch vielleicht ein bisschen einen Überblick bekommt.

Und natürlich, dass man einfach das transparent machen kann. Auch gleich für andere, die die Informationen auch haben wollen.

Und natürlich, man muss sich jetzt nicht den Paragraphen heraussuchen Welches Transparenzgesetz gibt es für welche Behörde?

Da wir in Österreicherin glaub ich neun unterschiedliche Landesauskunftsgesetze haben und einen Bundesauskunftsgesetz haben, müsste man sich auch nicht das mal raussuchen. Je nachdem wo man jetzt die Anfrage stellt, also es vereinfacht es schon auch.

Ja, man kann einfach suchen. Ähm ja, was noch?

Ja man hat einfach ein bisschen einen Überblickte und hat da die Anfragen gesammelt und kann dann vielleicht auch für irgendwelche Auswertungen noch besser auf die Daten zurückgreifen, als wenn man jetzt die ganzen Behörden wieder anfragen müsste: Wie viele Anfragen haben sie bekommen et cetera.

Was sind denn negative Aspekte von diesen Frameworks? Von diesen Portalen? Welche Funktionen fehlen?

Ich kann jetzt nur über fragdenstaat reden. Also hat sich auf alle Fälle über die Zeit verbessert. Was mir jetzt vielleicht noch fehlen würde sind wirklich noch ein paar weitere Statistiken, auch zum Beispiel so, dass man Karten hat, dass man Überblick hat. Ok, ist z.B. Niederösterreich transparenter als Salzburg oder vielleicht sogar wie ein Ranking einbaut. Ein bisschen Gamification, dass man sagt welche Gemeinde oder welche Organisation ist die transparenteste prozentuell?

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Sonst hat es schon die wichtigsten Sachen was mir jetzt auf die Schnelle einfallen würde beinhaltet.

Können Sie sich für ein bestimmtes Framework entscheiden, für ein bestimmtes Portal, das für Sie auf Landesebene das Standardframework sein sollte und wenn ja, welches? Wenn ich Land meine, meine ich eigentlich Staat Österreich. Das ist eine Übersetzungsungenauigkeit.

Ich kenne jetzt keine, also nicht wirklich andere, also kann ich schwer vergleichen, was es sonst noch für Portale gibt. Ich kann jetzt nur für fragtdenstaat voten.

Okay, das ist eine Antwort auf die Frage.

Kennen sie rti-rating.org - die Website ?

Nein.

Gut.

Letzte Frage: Haben Sie weitere Anmerkungen zum Thema, die Sie machen möchten?

Ja, ich finde es auf alle Fälle wichtig, dass endlich einmal ein gescheites Transparenzgesetz in Österreich und eigentlich überall kommt.

Man sieht z.B. Hamburg hat ein gutes umgesetzt, auch wenn sie jetzt anscheinend wieder am aufweichen sind.

Die Frage ist wann werden wir wirklich genug Druck von der Bevölkerung haben oder werden die Politiker sich wirklich dafür einsetzen, da es ja schon weiß jetzt nicht seit wieviel Jahren angekündigt ist von Rot-Schwarz 1, 2, 3 oder so und Schwarz-Blau bin ich mir nicht sicher, ob da auch was geplant war und es jetzt wieder von Türkis-Grün geheißen hat es sollte schon seit fast einem Jahr da sein , oder halbes Jahr glaube ich da sein. Aber bis jetzt hat man noch nichts gehört außer wieder Verschiebungen. Also es gehört jetzt wirklich langsam mal eins her, aber ich glaube das ist vor dem die Politiker am meisten Angst haben und das, was am meisten gegen Korruption und Freunderlwirtschaft et cetera in Österreich und anderen Ländern helfen würde.

Ok, vielen Dank! Wenn Sie wünschen, schicke ich Ihnen das Protokoll zu. Sobald es fertig ist.

Ja, danke.

Ja, okay, passt. Dann stoppe ich die Aufnahme.

5.1.9 Date of interview: 10th of febuary 2021 - Thomas Rupprecht - Translated into English

The original interviewing language was German, should there be any differences in meaning the German version is to be used before the English one. **Interviewer:** Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

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Interviewed Person: Thomas Rupprecht

Thank you very much for taking the time to support my master thesis. I will start right away with some organisational questions. May I record this interview?

Yes.

Thank you very much!

Is it okay to name you and your organisation? If not, I will anonymize your name and or organisation.

My organisation actually has little to do with the requests therefore I would ask that the organisation be omitted.

It's fine.

May I ask what you do for a living and in which countries you work?

I've been a web developer for eight years, programming various web projects and my employer is in Austria. But some of the projects are for other continents.

Is government and state transparency something you come into contact with in your daily or monthly work or or as a private occupation? If yes, please describe how

Only really comes up as a private interest.

Lately rather less, but in earlier times, so let's say five years ago, I have already made some inquiries or also always researched what other inquiries have already been made and again the answers are. Et cetera.

And did you work there with the help of laws at regional, state or EU level that allow access to public sector information?

So in the beginnings that I asked myself, I worked with the Lower Austrian law on the obligation to provide information and the Austrian law on the obligation to provide information.

What are your experiences with these laws on the obligation to provide information, also regionally related?

Well, in my case it was actually relatively positive from the requests I made. I have actually always received an answer. Except for one time, I always got a satisfactory answer. The one time was an inquiry to the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

And then the inquiry was rejected again with regard to the security of the state or something like that. But on the whole, I haven't had any problems, even though I've noticed enough that our laws are actually too lax to get the really interesting things out, so that they don't reject them. The only negative is perhaps that most requests the authorities have taken a relatively long time and used the deadline quite a bit.

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What then are the most important aspects that you think must be included in a transparency law or freedom of information law?

First of all, what you're actually allowed to ask for and that it's not worded too vaguely, that the authorities can reject every little thing right away on some slightly more critical topic, so that it really has to be defined quite precisely what things don't fall into it. And these things should not be too many. So really where it's about security of the state and so yes, but the rest rather not. Then, of course, the time limits. That they are not too long, because if you now have some important topic - after one year the topic is interesting and then we are already back to the tenth further topic. And then the costs, that now there are no costs for the citizen or if, then low costs. If, for example, the answer would really mean that we now have to print out 10,000 pages, and in this day and age printing out is no longer a good excuse, and what else? There must be something else, but I can't think of it right now.

Eventually the question is redundant. Which of these aspects are they currently missing and at what legislative level?

Um well missing - for myself none of them were missing now actually.

The only thing is that the questions I asked were not that critical, except for the one to the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

I don't find that critical, for example, that they don't give out any information at all, I don't know if it's interesting which topic it was about, if I should also tell that.

Ähm so gladly, gladly talk about it.

Ok, it was a request regarding silent SMS and IMSI Catcher, so how many times it was used in the year by BMI and or if it was used at all. And yes, as an answer has really only come: We don't give any information here for state protection reasons.

But otherwise from the other aspect I have now had no problems, but I have already noticed enough, where more critical inquiries have been made and then just again on the official secrecy has been invoked and thus actually the whole law does not fulfill the purpose.

Also it is already a bit executed, but: What positive, negative or neutral experiences have they had with disclosure laws?

Well, actually I have already enumerated this important thing anyway. Maybe one thing: In one inquiry of my own municipality, or actually in three inquiries of my own municipality, I was personally called by the major for a personal conversation. I was able to clear up a few misunderstandings and, after some discussion, I withdrew a request, for example, and did not make it public, but only received it personally. And not now officially about the request. Otherwise...

Do you evaluate that negatively, positively or neutrally?

Uh, yeah, I'll say.

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It was already a little bit justified. It was not something so delicate that you say Okay, you should absolutely publish that. And if I hadn't wanted to, then I would have published it anyway. So that was my own insight and not necessarily the pressure from the authorities. The fact that I was called personally could perhaps also be intimidation for some people. For me, it was definitely not.

For me, it was actually more like: Okay, the municipality has never had any experience with such inquiries, they didn't even know what exactly was going on, because I made the inquiry via fragdenstaat and yes, I at least explained a bit about what it means and when and so on. And I think that from their point of view it was probably not so bad for the community itself to get an explanation of what this is all about.

Whereas, as I said, most people are probably more intimidated by it and then perhaps withdraw the complaint straight away. So one came in both directions positive and negative see.

Thank you

What freedom of information request frameworks or transparency searches do they use?

So personally, I've only ever used fragdenstaat.at. I remember there is the same for Germany with fragdenstaat.de as well.

And I think that doesn't count as a freedom of information request anymore, or I don't know how to count that exactly, verklagdenstaat, so that would be the next step if the decision has been rejected and you get the decision, that you sue for it afterwards. Whether that now also directly belongs to it? So other direct portals I do not know somehow now.

I only know, for example, that Wikipedia or Wikimedia, I don't know who the official organisation is now, also financially supports transparency lawsuits that are interesting for Wikipedia.

But now of directly further portals I do not know now. I think I heard that there is something like fragdenstaat at the EU level, but used and looked at or so I have not yet.

What are the positive aspects of these portals and which features do you like?

First of all: It is relatively easy to find the authorities or the organisations that you want to contact. You don't have to research the email addresses et cetera on the Internet. You have a good overview of whether a request has already been made once, so that you don't make the same request again, which is often used as a reason by the authorities that a law on the obligation to provide information or transparency law is too much work for the authorities.

You can certainly look at some statistical data, how positive or how many positive completed or negative completed requests there are per authority.

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That one then perhaps also gets a bit of an overview.

And of course, that you can simply make that transparent. Also for others who want to have the information.

And of course, you don't have to pick out the paragraphs now, which transparency law exists for which authority?

Since I think we have nine different state information laws in Austria and one federal information law, you don't have to pick that out. Depending on where you make the request now, so it simplifies it already also.

Yes, you can simply search. Um yeah, what else?

Yes, you simply have a bit of an overview and have collected the inquiries and can then perhaps access the data even better for any evaluations than if you had to ask all the authorities again: How many inquiries have you received, etc.?

What are the negative aspects of these frameworks? Of these portals? What functions are missing?

I can only talk about fragdenstaat now. So it has improved over time in any case. What I would now perhaps still missing are really a few more statistics, also for example so that you have maps, that you have an overview. Okay, is, for example, Lower Austria more transparent than Salzburg or maybe even like a ranking built in. A bit of gamification, that you say which municipality or which organisation is the most transparent in per centage terms?

Otherwise, it has already included the most important things that I would think of right now.

Can you decide on a particular framework, a particular portal that should be the default framework for you at the country level and if so, which one? When I mean country, I actually mean state of Austria. This is a translation inaccuracy.

I don't know any now, so not really others, so it's hard for me to compare what other portals there are. I can only vote for fragtdenstaat now.

Okay, that's an answer to the question.

Do you know rti-rating.org - the website ?

No.

Good.

Last question: Do you have any other comments you would like to make on the topic?

Yes, I think it is definitely important that finally a clever transparency law comes in Austria and actually everywhere.

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You can see, for example, Hamburg has implemented a good one, even though they seem to be softening it up again.

The question is when will we really have enough pressure from the population or will the politicians really go for it, because it already knows now not for how many years is announced by Red-Black 1, 2, 3 or so and Black-Blue I'm not sure if there was also what was planned and it has now again from Turquoise-Green said it should already be there for almost a year, or half a year I think be there. But up to now one heard still nothing except again shifts. So it belongs now really slowly times one here, but I believe that is before the politicians most afraid and that which would help most against corruption and Freunderlwirtschaft et cetera in Austria and other countries.

Ok, thank you very much! If you wish, I will send you the minutes. As soon as it is ready.

Yes, thank you.

Yes, okay, it fits. Then I'll stop the recording.

5.1.10 Date of interview: 12th of febuary 2021 - Paddy Leerssen

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Paddy Leerssen

So am I allowed to record this interview?

Yes, you are.

Thank you.

Is it okay to name you and your organisation? If not, I will anonymize your name and/or organisation

It's OK.

OK.

What is the name of your employer, in which countries do you work and which countries are affected by your work?

Now, I work for the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and my work focuses on the European Union primarily.

Can you name the general tasks of the organisation you're working for, of the university? I mean, it's a university, but yeah, it's a standardized question.

I'm a PhD researcher.

That's my main task. And so I do teaching and research. And I work for the Institute for Information Law.

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Is government and state transparency is something you come in touch with your daily or monthly work. And if. Yes, please describe how.

So the first way is, is that my research topic is transparency in my research as an academic. So I mostly look at the ways in which platforms are regulated, and so how governments through law create transparency in platforms, so it's. What I focus on mostly is transparency created by governments about private entities. However, for that research, I also study how government transparency works as a template or an example for how it might work in the private sector, because platforms are increasingly seen as exercising kind of quasi-public our governmental roles. And so we might want to have transparency in similar forums and for similar reasons in platforms, as we have had it in the past for governments. And so I'm always looking at this analogies. That's a bit abstract, maybe so I might be able to give some examples, but that's the basic idea.

Thank you. I will never interrupt you. You can always feel free to talk as much as you want.

Feel free to interrupt me though, if you want to. I encourage it.

OK.

Have you worked with laws on a regional, country or EU level, that enable you to access information held by public authorities?

In my current job.

Yes, there was information held by public authorities, but it's actually information about platforms and specifically I've analysed reports that must be filed under the NetzDG, the German law, which you probably know, and. So those are reports that are produced by performers and actually I access them directly to the through the platform websites, but these are laws, disclosures that are required under German law and they have to be submitted to the federal ministry as well. So I don't know if you consider that a regional transparency law, but that's that's one thing I've looked at. Another... I think if there's other examples.

Um.

One of my colleagues were now involved in a project where we use the GDPR to do data access requests about platforms. So that's more about using government laws like the GDPR to get access again to to private company data. Another example I've looked at is the Facebook ad library and other public advertising disclosures, again, in this case, it's something that's hosted by the platforms. But there is a regulatory aspect to this because the European Commission has required the platforms to publish these kinds of reports, these ad libraries. And this is under the European Code of Practise on disinformation that this is required. So this is a code regulatory form of transparency and in addition. There is under the code of practice on disinformation, there have been progress reports hosted by the European Commission and again, this is all data provided by the platforms, but in some form or another mandated or required to be disclosed by government entities.

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Thank you

What are your experiences with right to information laws?

With transparency, right to information, freedom of information laws?

So are talking specifically about like Freedom of Information Acts, like request laws?

Yes, I'm talking about on the one hand, on the acts that enable you to request information and on the other hand, on acts that require states and governments to provide information without them having to be requested.

Okay, so for the first thing, for the Freedom of Information Act request laws, I haven't used them in my current position, but I did use them in the past when I was working for European digital rights, where we wanted to understand how the European Commission was - this is in 2015 - interacting with platforms and requiring them to delete content and do content moderation. We knew there was a private like secret group, what they called the IT forum or the Internet forum. Where the European Commission and the major platforms would kind of sit around the table and the commission will tell them what kind of content moderation to do on issues like counter-terrorism before any of this was formally kind of or publicly acknowledged or regulated. And we wanted to get as European digital rights as a watchdog wants to get more information about what was happening there. And so we submitted a Freedom of Information Act requests, which the European Commission barely complied with. And while I was there, we were working on appealing to the European Ombudsman for their lack of secrecy here. And I think later on in this process, groups like Edri were actually involved in. Like allowed to join the IT forum, so and I think the fact that we were able to kind of put pressure on it through the Freedom of Information Act, or like ombudsman and stuff, probably helped for that. So that's the one big experience I have with Freedom of Information Act requests.

As for like public databases and stuff. You know, I guess it depends if you consider that the examples I just listed as government databases, I guess not really, so otherwise I'd say no.

OK.

What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law?

Sorry can I add just one more on the previous answer?

Yes

There are some obvious examples, right? So like https://eur-lex.europa.eu is a big database of the European Union hosts of all the laws and case law. Right? And Holland has an online database with most of the court decisions published. And that's a government database. So, you know, that's one that every lawyer pretty much uses. But, you know, I think it's worth emphasizing that that's an important kind of essential function of the government to publish, to publicise that kind of thing.

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That's true.

Yeah.

Yes. Sorry, what was your second question again?

What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law?

I'm not an expert.

You can you can also name key aspects that helped you in your work to get information.

Yeah.

So the FOIA request is a long time ago. That was five years ago. So I'm not sure if I remember the details. I mean, obviously, one of the problems was that we got something which is really kind of censored. So a lot of it was kind of modified and blacked out. So we didn't get as much information as we'd need. So I guess one of the important things is having limited exceptions are restrictive interpretations of applicable exceptions as well as. One thing I find important is that it's.

That anyone can use them.

This might like. Right now, we have all these debates about platform data access where the European Commission is really focussing on like either universities and like university academics or like specific NGOs like and they create partnerships are they create like trusted flagging entities that get privileged data access. And I think that's not a good development. And what I like about FOIA in most countries is that anyone can use it. So it's not the government determining this is a watchdog. You know, anyone can be a watchdog. And that's, I think, really important for the independence and the kind of freedom of those watchdogs. So that's something I tend to emphasise, but other than that, I don't have very specific guidance for FOIA I'm affraid.

OK

yeah.

I'm never sure if I can skip a question, so, um, in the worst case...

Just asked them all

Yeah, I just ask them all and just you can answer them as you wish.

Which of the just named aspects are currently missing to you and on which legislative level?

Which aspects of of the the FOIA?

Yes

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Yeah. I mean. If there's one thing I think is really missing is like a FOIA for platforms, you know. We're trying to use a GDPR to do that in certain ways. My colleagues are. So you use the GDPRs data subject access rights to start to request information from platforms about how they process behaviour and stuff like that. But that's a major limitation I see is that as more and more functions of the state are moving into private hands, into the hands of platforms and other corporations. Those functions of regulatory functions are obscured from FOIA. You know, so that's I think the major problem with FOIA - the privatization and the retreat of government. Yeah, but the specifics of how FOIA works vis-à-vis the government is outside my expertise.

OK, thank you.

Have you worked with the Austrian so-called Auskunftspflichtgesetz?

No.

You might have mentioned this before, but, Fameworks: which do you use for right to information requests or transparency research. Which do or did you use ?

You mean like templates or something or?

Yeah, like templates like Internet websites that enable you to make such requests. Or do you just write emails?

Well, so I know about templates for GDPR access requests actually, but I don't know it in the context of FOIA, no.

Do these frameworks play a role for you when doing data research or conducting a RTI requests? So I guess the answer is no?

Not applicable. Yeah

Can you name all the frameworks you know?

Well, not applicable, I don't know any.

Yeah, but I still will ask this one question: Could you decide, for one, specific frameworks that should be a standard framework for you on a specific country level? And if. Yes, which one?

So, again, not applicable.

OK. Yeah, that's totally fine.

Do you know rti-rating.org ? The website?

No

OK

Do you have any additional remarks you would like to make?

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Well, certainly I'll be interested in seeing what you come up with, generally what my impression is...

Oh, there's one more thing I should talk about, I think, which is that. We did some research last year for Algorithm Watch. Where we try to look at best practices in the regulation of public data access as kind of blueprints or templates for how to apply this to platforms, and we looked at two sectors where we saw interesting examples. One is environmental data, where we looked at something called the E-PRTR <European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register >, which is the European Pollutants Register or something like that, I forget the exact acronym, but it's it was a registry for pollutants and emissions from industrial facilities in the EU. This seemed like a relatively effective framework to kind of inform public policymaking and regulation, et cetera, regarding pollution. So that was an interesting thing we looked at, we wrote about. And so that's figured in my work to a degree. And the other was health data, where we looked at an ambitious new project in Finland where they're creating a kind of like FOIA type procedure for people to apply for access to health data, for scientific research purposes. Almost comparable to what Facebook is doing with social science one, so and those are two very interesting frameworks we looked at.

A general comment I have, something we noticed there too, is that.

There is often not a lot of empirical research as to how that data is used.

And that's especially true for a kind of open data initiatives like non FOIA stuff. It's a problem we have in the platform debates as well, right?

We have all these theories, our assumptions, our expectations about like - that it's good for democracy or for a governance if it is made public and that people will use it. But how people actually end up using it is often really hard to study. There have been some really interesting is some really interesting research in the US related to FOIA because with FOIA, you can actually trace the individual requests like who was requesting? What are they requesting? And based on that data, you can start to understand the impact of those laws.

And for example, in the US, it turned out in this research that Journalism, which is typically the main stakeholder we identify with FOIA was like less than 10 per cent of all FOIA requests and the majority of the requests came from financial analyst firms who used FOIA to try to gain an edge in like Wall Street speculation. Right? Who, like the article, is called FOIA Inc., right? It's like the commercial takeover of FOIA lawy. And so, you know, as always, actually doing the empirical work can tell us all sorts of unexpected things about how these laws actually work in practice, including the probably commercial applications that often end up predominating.

So that's the case for FOIA, where you can study that in a more or less kind of comprehensive or rigorous fashion. But when you have these open databases. Who uses it? What they do with the data, it's all really, really hard to study. And that makes it really hard to do kind of evidence based policymaking as to what we need and what

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works and what doesn't work. That's true when it comes to platforms and it's true when it comes to governance, and that's - I found a few papers doing it. It's something I've tried to do myself as well. But that's an overarching challenge. So if there's one kind of recommendation I have for open data policy is that there are metrics involved, ping back mechanisms or other ways that make visible or measurable, to a certain degree, how it's used.

And then for scholars, I think the challenge for researchers is to also start to do that research like process tracing or interviews or content analysis, whatever we can do to start to not just have theories of the benefits of open data, but empirical evidence. And maybe that's what you're doing. I don't know. But that's something I'm interested in anyway.

Thank you.

Well, I guess that's it?

Yeah

OK, thank you very much for your cooperation. If you like, I will send you the transcript once it is ready.

Cool. Yeah, I look forward to seeing the paper as well.

5.1.11 Date of interview: 14th of febuary 2021 - Matthias Schindler

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Matthias Schindler

Um, thank you for sharing your time to support my master's thesis, I will start right away with some organisational questions. Am I allowed to record this interview?

Yes, you are.

Thank you. Is it OK to name you and your organisation, if not, I will anonymize your name and/or your organisation.

You can name me as a person. I do not have any affiliation to an organisation right now that should be named. So if we talk about past events, we have to discuss naming them. But in general, I. I think it's OK to name them, but, um, we should discuss it in the course of this interview.

OK.

In which countries do or did you work or which countries affected by your work, and if I say work, I also mean if you work privately on topics that are mentioned here in this interview.

Right. So from 2009 to 2014, I was a full time employee at Wikimedia, Germany e.V. After that, I was working for four years for Julia Reda in the European Parliament,

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one year for a member of the German Bundestag. And since 2019, I'm working for a member of the Brandenburg state legislature. So my location in each of these cases has been Germany. I was working from Berlin and Potsdam respectively. But the scope of my work was mostly pan-European. Some focusses on Germany, Belgium and for various reasons, Spain and a couple of other countries on a case by case basis.

Can you name the general tasks of the organisation you are or you did work for?

So, um.

As a project manager of the Wikimedia Germany, my main focus was on building and developing relationships to cultural institutions such as the German National Library or the German National Archives.

The main focus of this work has been to liberate content in a sense of convincing this organisations to release and make public works of art, cultural works or information as broadly defined as possible under public domain, terms of use or under free licenses.

And.

As a staff member of Julia Reda, my work was focusing around copyright reform and to a lesser degree on access to information laws and on reuse of content from public sector information institutions such as governments and administration. So this work consisted on the Open Data Directive, which is currently under transposition.

OK, thank you. Is government and state transparency, something you come in touch with your daily or monthly work or something you did come in touch with on a regular basis? And if yes, please describe how.

So, yes, um.

As a staff member of my current employer in the state legislature, transparency is something we discuss on a regular basis as we try to improve the access to information laws in the state of Brandenburg and in relevant institutions. So, for example, the state parliament of Brandenburg has changed its rules of procedure, once with regards to the open data release of content. And it's working currently with regards to the transparency and the, lobbying footprints or the legislative footprint when it comes to interactions of stakeholders in general.

Thank you. Um.

Yeah, that's one of the questions that, um,... have you worked with laws on the region of the country or you level that enable you to access information held by public authorities? Right. To information laws, for example?

So I have worked... - so with work, you mean invoking these rights or changing them?

Well, usually I mean by this question invoking them, but this question is unclear in the sense that people also who, who get such requests and work with them, could answer it. So, I mean, this question in a very broad sense.

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OK, so since 2005'ish, I am a frequent user of access to information laws whenever possible, so I do file access to information requests under the directive. 1049 2001, um, the Access to Information Directive that applies to EU institutions. Um, I'm a more or less frequent user of the German federal access to information law. Um and I sometimes use regional access to information laws in order to obtain information. Um, and then there is something like. Might be borderline case of trolling, using more obscure freedom of information laws to, um, to change government behavior. So, for example. Here's a broad example, the German Secret Service is exempt from the federal access to information law, but the Secret Service is not exempt from the access to environmental data information law. So you can't obtain information from the German Bundesnachrichtendienst, but you can request information from them regarding the environmental impact of their destruction of records. Or at least you can try. But they have to answer these questions nonetheless. So basically it's a kind of educational process for them to... at least to force them to acknowledge the existence of access to information laws in general.

But there is no immediate benefit from doing so. It's a long term effort.

OK, thank you.

What are your experiences with, right to information laws?

So, the first experience is they are incredibly slow, it usually takes more time to obtain actual information than anyone could estimate from reading the plain text of the law. So, of course, the law says that something example, most requests would be done within one month or should be dealt with within two weeks. But this usually applies to the first stage. And then administration has become quite skilled in invoking exemptions and possible methods for delaying these requests. So. It is not uncommon for me to be engaged in a single Freedom of information law request that takes about a year from the first request to the final notification on my request.

What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law?

So the first one should be a duty for government institutions to make transparent information on a proactive basis, so they should publish the key information about their filing structure and all the information required to enable anyone else to actually file meaningful access to information requests. So it should be possible to obtain a list of all files available from administration before having to actively request them.

That's a fundamental thing.

Second aspect should be present in any access to information law should be that simple requests should be free of charge. And then there are a couple of more elements, such as access to one, access to many components. So if anyone actually requests some information and it's released to a person, it should be made available to anyone else, without any further procedure.

Um, there should be a component for reuse, so if information is released to a person after a Freedom of Information request, the person should have the rights to actively

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disseminate and make public this information without having to fear of any kind of copyright infringement, for example, or violation of state secrets and so on.

There should be there should be hard deadlines in such a law and there should be a two tier approach. First the right to get help from the ombudsperson that exists in a state, and secondly, to call on the courts to enforce freedom of information.

For example, in the case of the EU. Both components exist, but they are technically mutually exclusive because if you go to a court, you can no longer ask the ombudsperson for help. And if you go to the ombudsperson, her help is going to take longer than the deadlines prescribed by the courts. So it's an either or decision and it should not be mutually exclusive.

Which of these aspects are currently missing to you and on which legislative level?

So the first one is, that's a kind of a tragedy because many laws I know do have a certain amount of requirements for governments to publish key structure of their archiving and their filing structure, but most of them never do, and there is no harm for them to simply ignore these mandates.

So, technically, it's not missing from the law, but it's missing in practise. For example, in the case of Berlin or in the case of Germany.

It's missing from the Directive EC/1049/2001 < `https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32001R1049` > , for example, too.

Hamburg has a mandate for proactive publishing, this is quite helpful, so it's not missing everywhere.

Have you worked with the Austrian so-called Auskunftspflichtgesetz?

I haven't yet, the last thing I heard from the Freedom of Information law is that Austria does not have a freedom of information law until the green... Is it still black or turquoise? the former ÖVP?

Yes it's turquoise.

Yeah. The coalition has had a coalition agreement "Koalitionsvertrag", that was incredibly detailed on introducing freedom of information law. So as someone who has worked on these coalition agreements, I can only imagine how hard fought this compromise must have been if they ended up writing down almost every aspect of it before even enacting it. But I haven't seen it in action yet. So, I can't say anything about this law and practise.

Just as an explanation, it's still not published, so it's still not enforced, so. It's not there yet, it's written down that it should come, but it's not there yet.

Okay

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So there's a follow up question to this question that I will skip and we'll go to framework's.

Which framework's for right to information requests or transparency research do you use?

So most of my requests are usually done, via ask the EU or fragdenstaat, I assume that this is what you mean by framework?

Yes, I mean both. I mean frameworks by private citizens or institutions to ask the government questions and also frameworks for providing public information by the states and by the government.

Right. So I have used the the freedom of information websites by the CIA, the NSA, I've used, whatdotheyknow which was the UK platform run by an NGO. And I have made requests via email in the past. Just invoking these rights by hand, if possible.

Do these frameworks play a role for you when doing data research or conducting right information requests? Yes. So first of all, I usually try to see if anyone has ever asked this question before because it was would be embarrassing. Also, it would create undue burden to an administration if I make that same request twice. And then, of course, these platforms help me keep track of deadlines and possible means of escalating a request if the result is not satisfying.

Besides, the already named frameworks are the other frameworks that you know?

Depends on the the definition of knowing. So, I did attend several conferences on access to information, one in Oslo and one in Potsdam. So I attended a presentation by the Albanian Data Protection Agency, which did run a copy of fragdenstaat, because their assumption was basically Albania does not have a civil society strong enough to maintain such a platform themselves. On the other hand, they have a quite powerful access to information law. So it's only logical that the data protection agency itself is running and maintaining this platform in order to help citizens make use of their laws.

So I know the platform as: I know that it exists, but I have not made any requests in Albanian to organisations and public government institutions there.

Thank you

From the framework that you did use, what are the positive aspects of the frameworks which you used and which features do you like and also what other negative aspects of these frameworks and which features are missing for you?

So there are many positive components, one is actually the kind of, um, the housekeeping, I'm bad at logistics and I'm grateful for anyone who helps me keep track of these ongoing requests, if they take a year or even longer in some cases. I like the...

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Sorry to interrupt, can you also name the framework you're talking about when you talk about it?

So let's talk about the the "asktheeu" one, because this was the one that in general had the most amazing results for my work, so asktheeu, but it behaves quite similar to fragdenstaat. So in general, these comments apply to many platforms.

And the fact that you can see what other people are doing is quite amazing because it helps you learn from other people's mistake and you can actually try to avoid pitfalls when dealing with administration, so this is something I really like.

So there was recently a feature added to asktheeu, that allowed me to make batch requests so I can ask the same request to, let's say, 150 EU institutions at the same time, which is, well, depending on the topic. So, for example, I was interested in a US company called Palantir, is known to some people, and basically I asked every EU institution what kind of interactions they had in the past with palantir. So it was quite a broad request and it made sense to ask basically all the EU institutions the same question and such a batch request would be hard, but not impossible to do by hand and using the batch request tool by asktheeu it was a matter of seconds. That was something I really like. And it's not missing from these platforms, but it's usually only provided for paying customers. So in an ideal world it would be available to all users regardless of membership status and payment plan.

Thank you. Could you decide for one specific framework that should be the standard framework for you on a country level? And if yes, which one?

Can you can you rephrase the question again? **A rephrase? OK, um.**

Your home state is Germany? Yes. **And if you would say Germany does provide one framework for citizens to make transparency requests. Which framework would you decide for, which should be?**

I think the fragdenstaat one would be the natural candidate. For reasons of usability, reliability, um.

In certain cases, the asktheEU framework, the I think the the framework itself is Alaveteli.

It's slightly better when dealing with multilingual requests or working in a multilingual environment. But for example, in the case of Germany, in the case of Austria, I think the fragdenstaat platform is sufficient. There might be edge cases on certain local levels. So, for example.

As far as I'm aware, there are a small municipalities in eastern Austria that are bilingual. So it might be relevant for a country to provide a framework that respects minority rights on linguistic minorities, and I'm not I'm not fully convinced that fragdenstaat would be able to support such multilingualism out of the box, but it should not be a deal breaker.

Thanks. Do you know the website rti-rating.org ? Yes

Could you rate your overall impression of the information provided there?

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And please feel free to name positive and negative aspects of the website and the information provided.

It's a helpeful approach to to benchmark governments. Well, the results, I think the mere fact that you can start comparing countries and that you can actually work on an international level on actually trying to come up with any meaningful metric, is reason enough to do it. You shouldn't be too reliant on numbers. You shouldn't. Just so, for example, one of the most common pitfalls of these platforms is to rely on the the legal requirements, as they are stated in the law and ignoring the practical application, so it so technically Russia has a freedom of information law, but just the law written in the books itself does not tell you anything about the person's rate of success, of actually obtaining information or getting the information and then being slapped with any kind of repressive reaction from the administration itself.

So just comparing "what should be" based on the law itself might not be enough. It's not an argument against rti-rating, it might be just an argument against people just taking a number at face value and then saying "well, this country is five points better than the other one" without some critical thinking and critical reading.

End remarks, do you have any additional remarks that you would like to make on this overall topic?

Freedom of information is not a one way street. If the end goal is just to obtain one piece of information, then a single person can actually be successful in many countries in obtaining this information, on the other hand, if the end goal is to change the approach and transparency that the government and the administration has towards its citizens, then it becomes a group effort in which you actually have to rely on a broad coalition of NGOs and activists and professionals to obtain information, to use it in their daily work and then to create an environment in which this tool, is no longer something that only fringe elements of society would use, but also any respectable person just use it as I use it, as a as a daily routine basically. And this is something that can't be prescribed in the law itself, which requires basically coalition building and not just coalition building amongst activists for transparency, but also for anyone working on special interests. So the animal rights activists and the environmentalists and the people engaged in financial and fair trade and taxation.

And so the more the merrier. And these these laws only become meaningful when they are used, so the focus of any discussion should also be to broaden the user base as widely as possible. So even if you don't agree to the agenda of a catholic organisation dealing with abortion, for example, the mere fact that they would be using access to information law to the state would be helpful to a certain degree, and then you can still find them on the merits of their agenda, of course, for example.

OK, thank you very much for your cooperation, if you would like to have it, I can send the transcripts to you once it is ready.

OK, you can, but no need to hurry.

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Yeah, It will take time.

5.1.12 Date of interview: 22nd of febuary 2021 - Georg Krakow

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Georg Krakow

Thank you for sharing your time. Am I allowed to record this interview?

Yes, of course, you may record this interview.

Is it OK to name you and your organisation, and if not, I will anonymize your name and/or your organisation?

Well, we can decide that after the interview because then I know what I have said, but in principle there is no objection.

But finally we will decide on it together after it's conducted

That's also perfectly fine.

What is the name of your employer and which countries do you work? Which also includes which countries are affected by your work?

Well, of course, I am based in Vienna, Austria, and my professional work that I do is mostly related to this country and to criminal compliance and civil law in this country. But today, most of white collar related cases have an international impact. So you always have to consider the law and the legal system and the environment of some of the countries, mostly those countries are in Europe. But sometimes they are also located in the Middle East or of course, the other large economic players in the world like the United States, China and Russia.

Can you name the general tasks of the organisation you're working for?

It's a law firm. It's one of the world's largest law firms, Baker McKenzie, and it has offices, I believe, in approximately 70 countries.

Is a government and state transparency something you come in touch in your daily or monthly work? And if yes, please describe how.

Well, yes, not so much by my professional business as a lawyer, but as a member of the Board of Transparency International Austrian chapter, I do, of course, and I consider and comment on all the transparency related issues of state legislation or of cases where transparency is an issue.

Thank you.

And I know, this will be a double question, but have you worked with laws on regional, country or EU level that enable you to access information held by public authorities? Right to information laws, for example?

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According to my experience and the discussions I had Austria is rather restrictive country when it comes to information freedom, of course there are cultural and historical differences throughout Europe. But there are countries like, for example, Germany and UK that more liberal in obtaining information, in obtaining information from... of... related to public conduct in particular - Conduct of public officials.

On which regional level have you worked with transparency laws or with right to information laws? If regional please named the region and on the country level, please name the country and international level as well.

Well, national level mostly, and of course Austria, but also the I name like Germany to the United States, UK, those were the countries, where I at recent or more recent worked with right to information laws.

What are your experiences with right to information laws?

Ambigous, the people, the public officials that have to oblige to such rules are often not too happy about it, because for once they think that they have to protect the people they have information about.

And on the other hand, they may fear that some mistakes they made might come to public knowledge or to the knowledge of somebody else, and I do not mean that they think about certain mistakes.

Like, hopefully he won't uncover the mistake I did last June, but unknown mistakes, because many people have the feeling they might have made mistakes in the past, which they even don't know about, but there might be.

And they fear that such mistakes could be uncovered.

And that is why they oblige, not full heartedly to information freedom legislation.

I think it's a very important point to us and to acknowledge this fear -and so information freedom should always be accompanied by accepting that nobody's perfect.

If if you have information freely available and people would access this information and afterwards do nothing else but point out the public officials are working on such cases and point out the errors and mistakes, then this would be counterproductive.

So there should be acceptance that also public officials, of course, are not perfect human beings like everybody else, and so much information and conducting such proceedings might reveal mistakes, but that's the normal course of life.

Thank you.

What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law?

A key aspect is that it is easy to manage on both sides, so information must be easy to access. You should not have to have to fill out a 12 page form, but it should be sufficient, for example, to write an e-mail. And on the other side, it should not trigger a process

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that is exhaustive for the administration, but it should be as well easily accomplishable on this side. Additionally, I believe there should be two institutions.

One should be accessible by persons who seek information or look for information and who want to know how it's done and which information they can get and which they don't. So this should be a kind of advising organisation for the public, for the citizens.

On the other hand, there should be kind of a single point of contact.

Also, some department where public officers can tend to, if they are confronted with an information request, because of the information requests is not the primary goal of their public office.

They have to work in the medical department, in the department making laws or in the police office, and they may have questions related to a particular information request where it would be useful to have somebody that they can ask because this department deals all the while with information requests and so has much higher knowledge about this subject. Additionally, this would over time, guarantee an equal handling of information requests because it would then possibly not be dependent if I have a willing public official or a not so willing public official.

Which of these aspects are currently missing to you and on which legislative level?

Basically, all of them are missing currently. And I missed a further key aspect and this is the culture aspect. In particular in Austria currently we are still living in the kind of age where everything should be secret if there is no law, that it should not be secret.

And this is a cultural issue and it should be the other way around. Everything should be accessible. Everything that is done by the administration, by the public administration, should be accessible if there is no law that something has to stay secret.

Of course, there are good reasons for keeping some informations confidential, but this should be the exception, not the rule.

And all of them are missing currently.

What positive, neutral and negative experiences did you make with the Austrian Auskunftspflichtgesetz?

Well, it is positive that it exists, and so it has been a first step from the administration secrecy to the new age, but it is only a first step.

It is quite bureaucratic.

It triggers a large administrative process. People are still suspicious.

Sometimes people who request information are seen as kind of people who who just ask questions to bother the public officials and not because they really want and need some information.

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So in German, you would say, "querulatorische Fragen" [querulous questions].

And so it is better than to have nothing.

But on the other hand it is of course not sufficient for a modern society.

Which frameworks for right to information requests, transparency, research to use, and do these frameworks play a role for you when doing data research or conducting right to information requests?

Well, we believe that there should be a development and a kind of evolution within the country, so you have to start at the point where a single country is with its information freedom, and then you have to develop on their own. I don't think that it is useful to kind of import a foreign framework as a whole into a country where you don't have these traditions already.

So do you use frameworks for conducting right to information requests or don't you? And with frameworks, I mean, for example, Internet databases provided by Austria or fragdenstaat.at to make this question more clear.

Well, we do not restrict ourselves to a certain database or to certain databases. In general all of the of the information publicly available is the environment information environment where we look into.

Can you can you name all the websites, all the frameworks that you know that you use in your work with transparency?

Actually no, I can't name them because it is done, of course, also on an individual basis.

So one of us might use certain databases and another person might use other databases.

But generally speaking, I do not believe there is a kind of database in Austria at the current time, which comes near an information freedom database. In the discussions about information freedom legislation, it was discussed that there should be a database where public authorities could put in information, thought you would not have to ask the authorities for the information, but you could simply access to information by yourself.

I believe that this is in principle a good idea, but I do not see any database that has this functionality at this point of time in Austria

If you could decide for one, specific frameworks, that should be the standard framework for you in Austria that would provide this functionality you were talking about, which would this be or does not exist yet?

It doesn't exist yet.

OK, thank you.

Do you know rti-rating.org, the website?

No.

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OK, then we're nearing the finish. Are there any additional remarks that you would like to make? Concerning transparency

Of course, I do hope that the efforts for an information freedom legislation, which have come to kind of halt in the last months due to the overwhelming Corona issue, will not be stopped. But I hope that it will go forward because I really believe we need some change on this issue in Austria.

And I have seen years of discussion already and nothing happened in the law. And so I believe there should be a change of the law within the next year.

OK, thank you very much for your cooperation and if you would like to have it, I will send the transcript once it is ready.

Thank you

I will stop the recording now.

5.1.13 Date of interview: 22nd of febuary 2021 - Markus Hametner

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Markus Hametner

Thank you for sharing your time.

Sure thing.

Am I allowed to record this interview?

Of course.

Is it OK to name you and your organisation?

Uh, yes

OK, so what is the name of your employer, in which countries do you work, which also includes which countries are affected by your work?

I am currently not employed by Forum Informationsfreiheit, but that's the organisation that I represent and I'm on the board for. And that's, I think, the most relevant one here.

Yes.

And I work in Austria mainly.

Can you name the general tasks of Forum Informationsfreiheit?

Forum Informationsfreiheit is a Civil Society Association / NGO that has the goal of improving transparency in Austria, especially abolishing the provision for state secrecy by default and generally reaching more transparency of government and governance.

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As I said, sometimes questions will double. Is government, transparency and transparency, something you come in touch with your daily or monthly work at Forum Informationsfreiheit? And if yes, please describe how.

Maybe I'll add something to that. I'm also a data journalist. I was employed at der-Standard, a large Austrian daily, and I was employed at addendum afterwards, which was an investigative news platform. And both as a journalist, as and as an activist, I have come in contact with government intransparency and state secrecy regularly.

In Austria, it's generally politically sensitive Topics are very hard to get reliable information on and about in Austria because of state secrecy.

Have you worked with rights to information laws and if yes, on which level? In which regional level? Country level or higher level, EU level, for example?

I have mostly worked on RTI issues in Austria, but I've also had sent requests to the UK, the EU, Germany, and Slovenia, I think.

Was that the question? Sorry

yes, yes, yes.

And also in Austria, in the "Bundesländer" [federal states] as well?

On all levels, literally, I've sent requests to municipalities, states and to federal level.

OK.

What are your experiences with right to information laws, with freedom of information laws?

They are mostly bad in Austria. They're a mixed bag everywhere, in my experience, everywhere else. For example, I mean, Austria has had a huge corruption case for almost 20 years now, the Eurofighter purchase. In which there were offset deals for one, and all the contracts to purchase contracts are being kept secret.

And one of my first requests was actually for the offset... the list of companies that registered offset deals.

Basically, the Eurofighter company promised to buy Austrian products in exchange for Austria buying the Eurofighter Planes and for a long time, we did not know which companies profited by registering offset deals with the government and that case I won relatively quickly in retrospect, but the contract itself, the purchase contract is still secret.

And for comparison, I asked the UK, which is a country that owns parts of Airbus/Eurofighter and codeveloped Eurofighter for their purchase contracts and they gave them to me. They redacted some sensitive technical information from those contracts.

The UK government apologized repeatedly for the delays because they had to censor some information in the documents, but I received the documents from the UK from

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one of the owners of the Eurofighter company, while Austria claimed there was a secrecy agreement between Austria and Eurofighter, which is why they can't give me anything. That case is actually currently waiting for a decision at the Supreme Administrative Court in Austria, but it has been waiting there for one and a half years. And one of the main points of contention there is, is that I asked for the contract. And in Austria, the law that enables me to ask for information from public bodies, does not explicitly grant access to documents.

The first instance court basically holds if one asks for a document, that is not a question one can ask under Austria's access to information legal framework.

And that's a decision that I've been waiting for since April 2019

And the request that I sent in 2016, I believe 2015 or 2016.

Thank you.

What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law, and which of these aspects are currently missing to you and on which legislative level?

Well, there are two legislative levels in Austria, state and federal, and all the laws in Austria are based on the same model legislation.

So it's basically the same law. So everything that's missing is missing from all the laws.

And as I said, what's missing is a commitment to access to documents, so I can ask for documents and receive them. A commitment that partial access is possible, as in: if there's one name or one phone number or one private detail or one technical secret in a in a document, that's not a ground [reason] to not release the whole document, all of the document, but that's a ground [reason] to maybe black out one sentence. That's the basic of any access to information law. Of course, we want – Forum Informationsfreiheit wants, and I want – certain proactive information duties for public bodies like all of the contracts, all of their studies, all of their statistics should be open by default. Contracts may be starting at a certain value. I think Slovenia has a lower limit of a thousand or 5000 euros, we could talk about that, but everything else, every sizeable contract should be open by default. And then there is the question of: How do we enforce the law? and that's a huge issue in itself. In Austria, we have a so-called enforcement through the administrative courts, but the Supreme Administrative Court has regularly ruled that the first instance can only decide if a public body has rightfully or wrongfully denied information. The first instance cannot rule how the public body has to provide information. And in one case, we even found that the court cannot ask for the public body for information and be guaranteed to receive it.

So we have the situation where we have a court that is designed to decide asylum cases or administrative fines that are all concentrated in one folder, in one act. That now has to decide on information that is outside of one folder and one act, like I can ask in the future, I should be able to ask for all documents pertaining to X.

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And if the public body says there is no such information, we should have be able to have a third party come in and look for that information and confirm that there is no such information.

And right now, even if the public body says there is information X, Y and Z that pertains to that question, it is not necessarily submitted to the court.

And the court cannot enforce enforced access to the information, the access to which they have to decide over. So there's a lot of details and enforcement procedural details that will need to be worked out and will need to be massively improved for right to information legislation to be successful in Austria and I have still not seen the new draft, that was actually supposed to be out today.

So I can't tell you, if there are already plans for these improvements, I hope there are and I fear there are not, because if you would have told me two years ago that a court can't get to the information they need to decide about, I would have laughed at you. But since then it has happened to me.

So there're a lot of issues that I may not even be aware about and that we need to think of when evaluating new drafts.

I'm rambling.

That is fine.

It will be transcribed using a Web framework, and I don't have to do it all manually and it works really fine so you can talk as much as you want. Feel free. Yeah, um,...

Have you worked with, frameworks for RTI requests or transparency research - like Internet frameworks?

What do you mean by framework's?

I mean websites. I mean, two different kinds of websites for one, websites like fragdenstaat.at, where you can put in questions and the government will be asked this question and you will get the answer. And on the other hand, frameworks provided by the states where they proactively provide information.

Right. So I actually operate one of those website called fragdenstaat.at , which I also work with. Like if I'm asking the government for information and I'm not on a deadline, I will often use fragdenstaat to send that request and to manage that request, which has basically two one upside of reminding me when I am legally allowed to like ask to court for decisions and stuff like that.

The government does not operate request portals, the government does operate open data portals like data.gv.at which I obviously use.

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But journalistically these are not usually datasets one can draw a lot of value out of, like these are. The government proactively provides some information by intransparent processes, to be quite honest, I don't know why one dataset is published and one isn't.

But data.gv.at is a good website to look for information that might already be online, look for what kind of information public bodies might have or if they're comparable public bodies, like if I'm looking for information in one state, I might look for information from other states and see what they have so I can have an idea on what the structures are and what might be present in a public body to then prepare requests to those public bodies.

I'm not sure if you're going to ask for this, so I'm going to mention it anyway. There is also frameworks for rating information laws like the right to information rating and there's a German one for the states also, that I don't have in mind right now, and they are super useful to first see what best practices other countries are using.

And second, for seeing how new drafts are stacking up in an international comparison.

Um, thank you.

Yeah, some of these questions will now double, so beware. You've already mentioned some framework's you know, do you know any other frameworks?

Well, you did mention the request framework's, the request website fragdenstaat.at, which is actually the child of the German platform fragdenstaat.de, which is using the same software. There is also Alaveteli based platforms like asktheeu on the EU level, whatdotheyknow in the UK?

I no there's a Spanish version and I know there's currently no Italian version, but there was one. So I use and or know about those. And I've also, I am not sure if you're going to count that, used the European ombudsman's system for filing complaints about not getting information from EU public bodies.

Thank you.

And also, as of today, the Austrian Volksanwaltschafts system for complaining about public bodies.

So that's new.

Since today?

Yeah,

OK. It's really new.

OK, I'll skip the question where I ask you if these frameworks play a role for you in doing the research or acting right to information requests, because obviously they do.

Yeah, I mentioned that they're, first of all, the basis for figuring out what to ask for and second of all, of course, also looking for data that might already be public.

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Yeah.

Concerning all of these frameworks, what are positive aspects of these frameworks, which features do you like and what are negative aspects of these frameworks? Which features are missing to you?

Honestly, I'm super happy with fragdenstaat, except that I need to admin a server for that and I'm not the world's best sysadmin.

What is missing from most of them? And I think that hasn't changed since I last looked, is managing the court process like the process of appealing public bodies decisions. Fragdenstaat is squarely about interacting with the public body.

And in Germany, they do have an option for sending decisions to ombudsman institution. But it does not go as far as to allow people to forward things to courts and in Austria as well and all of the Alaveteli based platforms, I think neither, so that's an obvious potential improvement. One of the things that's also been on my to do for literally all the time fragdenstaat.at has been life, is an option to use it to send access to environmental information requests, which usually are a different legal framework than general requests for information from the public bodies.

That hasn't happened. My favorite feature, to be honest, is the redaction tool that allows me to not have everyone know my home address when I'm when I'm publishing documents from public bodies because while I'm very stalkable, I also don't want every document to have my home address visible and easily searchable.

Thank you.

Could you decide on one specific framework that should be the standard framework for you on the country level? And if yes, which one?

Well, I personally have been running fragdenstaat, based on froide for years and last time I checked, it was still my favorite.

Thank you.

Let's switch to rti-rating. Well, you already mentioned it. Do you know RTI rating dot org?

Yes, I have approached it extensively.

Could you read your overall impression of the data provided there?

Honestly, it has everything. Like A+. Would create if it wasn't there already, because it has to translate the laws, it has not only discourse, but the experts comments to discourse. So it really makes international comparisons super easy. And it has been super useful generally. It would also have been useful, but it definitely doesn't hurt that Austria is on the last place and that ranking we have cited regularly, extensively and to the point of boredom on our side. But media keeps quoting it, so we'll keep doing it.

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Thank you I just realised that the questions I used for the interview guide were not the last updated ones, but I, I think I got every information that I wanted to have. So all's well. Everything is fine. Um.

Are there any positive or negative aspects of RTI rating and information that you would like to mention that you think are there.

I'm going to have to repeat myself, because: translated laws, there's not only discourse, but also the comments from the people who score the laws in how the laws reach to those scores. The Excel file where you can download all the things is super helpful to be like: I want to compare this subpoint in all the laws. Let me see the scores and the comments – I've done that multiple times for reviews of drafts.

End remarks, do you have any additional remarks that you would like to make?

Oh, God. I mean. One of the things I can probably mention is that I've been, I have reached rulings at the Supreme Administrative Court twice, and I've won twice and generally, once you decide that a case is worth pursuing on a court level, I have had a lot of success. I'm not at a hundred per cent anymore because I got creative with my requests. But the Austrian problem is more, that the law like....

There are terrible parts...

Like, the law is terrible, there's no question of it. The Court of Human Rights has had a huge positive effect on government transparency, I've won cases because the Court of Human Rights has established a human right to information for public watchdogs, according to the Convention of Human Rights, based on Article 10, freedom of expression and public bodies have often refused to see that point, refuse to consider that point in their decisions and have been corrected by the courts, but the courts are slow and every improvement will help further that, and I think it would be wise to expand that right to information. Not only to public watchdogs, but to everyone, the court of Human Rights probably won't do that, but Austria should do it.

Well, thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sure thing.

If you'd like to have it, I will send the transcript to you once it is ready.

Uhm sure.

OK.

5.1.14 Date of interview: 23rd of febuary 2021 - Robert Harm

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Robert Harm

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Thank you for your time to support my master's thesis. Am I allowed to record this interview?

Yes OK

Thank you.

Is it OK to name you and your organisation? If not, I will anonymize your name and/or organisation.

Federal Computing Center. It's OK to name it, yeah. I asked in the... i informed the press department,

OK

I would like to receive a copy once it is done.

You will receive a copy before it is published. And it's also possible to reconsider later and anonymize yourself or the name of your organisation later on.

OK, thanks.

What is the name of your employer and in which countries do you work, which also includes which countries are affected by your work?

I work at the Federal Computing Center of Austria, which is only operating in Austria for the government and federal institutions.

Can you name the general tasks of the organisation you are working for?

The Federal Computing Center provides applications and services for the government, for citizens, enabling e-government and open government Austria on a high level.

Is government and state transparency, something you come in touch in your daily or monthly work? And if yes, please describe how.

Yes, I'm personally responsible for the Austrian Open data portal: data.gv.at, which is the main portal for providing open government data in Austria for all entities from ministries, counties and municipalities.

Have you worked with laws on regional country or EU level then that enable you to enact sorry, that enable you to access information held by public authorities? Right, to information laws?

Can you repeat this, please? I don't understand, didn't understand it.

Yeah, OK, Basically, the question is asking if you use the right to information, laws to provide - it's that the question is best either for journalists if they use public information or to get information from authorities or if if I ask people from public authorities if they use those laws to provide information to other people.

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Yeah, this doesn't correlate to my position here directly, because we are the enabler for the public authorities, providing them with a platform where they can provide the data. And on the other hand, we have a platform also for citizens who can then access the data. In our position we do not access or we are not involved in freedom of information laws as we are a service provider for the government.

Okay.

Do you have any experiences with, freedom of information laws?

Well, due to the newness of the topic to open data related without the freedom of information law, there is no substantial growth in open data.

I'm of course, interested in freedom of information laws and following the debate and the debate in Austria for several years and yesterday, there was a big milestone where the draft for the Freedom of Information law was published for legislative consultation.

This question is meant in general and not meant in a not meant concerning yesterday's law: Which are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law.

There are several aspects which I consider important, it's a short period of time from asking a question and getting getting an answer, it should be a dedicated person/organisation, so-called "Informationsfreiheitsbeauftragter" [Freedom of Information Officer], would be desired, in my opinion, to be able to solve disputes more quickly and having to turn to courts for desicions. And the barrier for information, for relevant information, shouldn't be too high. Currently i guess it's 100.000 euros for studies or informations in Austria to be considered as common interest. If you look in other countries like Slovenia, the barrier for this threshold is 1000 euros.

Uhm, thank you. And this might be a double question, but I'm sticking to my interview guide, so questions can double:

No problem

Which of these aspects you just mentioned are currently missing to you and on which legislative level?

Uh, take the current draft, if you consider this as what is planned, this is definitely missing a "Informationsfreiheitsbeauftragter" [Freedom of Information Officer] and the other aspects are included like the threshold and and the time to get an answer, but not truly, not yet following international best practices from other countries who have been dealing with freedom of information laws for several years, there could be optimized values for thresholds and times to get an answer.

So, you were referring to the draft and not to the actual status quo of the current law.

In fact into the current draft because the current laws is - I don't reflect on the current status anymore.

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It's even worse in how to get information and actually there is not really a right to information, because the "Amtsgeheimnis" [Official secrecy] is currently still applying and so... Yeah - I'm not reflecting on this.

Uhm, should I not ask any further question about the Austrian Auskunftspflichtgesetz?

I'm not so good at the ... – uhm, I would prefer to skip those questions if possible.

Okay.

Which frameworks for right to information requests or transparency research do you use or do you provide or do you know?

As an organisation?

Um, at least my employer doesn't provide any related freedom of information, as there is no freedom of information law, services yet. This might change in the future. What I personally know is community based or NGO based platforms like fragdenstaat.at, which are platforms where the process of asking for information is made transparent and a very good way of making the process transparent.

Who asks what and what is the answer. Also sharing, yeah.

Do these frameworks play a role for you when conducting right to information requests and can you name all the frameworks that you know?

Personally, I don't really do Freedom of Information requests as I'm sat in my role here, we're a service provider.

I know those tools from private - as a private person, but I haven't actually used them, like fragdenstaat.at. I don't know, another framework yet, at least I don't remember.

Okay.

Are there reasons why you are not using them? Are there positive and negative aspects about these frameworks and maybe features that you like or features that are missing for you?

The framework itself is, i refer to fragdenstaat.at, quite good. It would also be interesting to have a similar framework on a governmental level. If you look to the United States they have foia.gov, which is actually a fragdenstaat as an official version for the United States. I think these frameworks have their role and a very important feature I like is to making transparent if one person asks a specific question and others can join in and say this interests me too. And this makes it better for the for the agency having to provide the info to say, oh, there's really an interest for a topic if others join in I'm interested too. This is a feature, I think it's very, very good.

And could you decide for one specific framework that should be your standard framework for you on a country level? And if yes, which one?

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I remember there is also on the Vienna level, there is also a discussion at the idea board where you can ask for open data sets.

This is a proprietary solution. I don't know if there are common frameworks for this kind of service. I think as far as I know, I think I know there are custom developments, so I'm not sure if there is a software solution, especially for this, but a use case of freedom of information requests might be a workflow based engine, actually, you need a workflow based engine, but I don't know which one I haven't researched it.

OK.

Do you know www.rti-rating.org?

Yes

Could you rate your overall impression of the information provided there and feel free to name positive and negative aspects of the website and the information provided?

Uhm actually, I just know this site, because there is the Freedom of information ranking, which I sometimes look or refer to.

But the other content, I'm not aware which are the infos they provide and I don't need this for my daily work.

As far as I know - and I'm not supposed to tell answers in the interview - but as far as I know, it's the only thing that is provided: the information of the ranking and the historic information of the ranking.

Wait for a second.

Ah, OK, it's just the rating. OK, yeah i like the map.

OK, thank you.

Coming to the end, do you have any additional remarks that you would like to make?

Uh, too global, you can ask me more questions, but I don't know where to start.

OK

What would you like to know?

Um, I was, also interviewing you because you were head of open3.at.

That that's my private role, not within the federal computing center. It's a non-profit association where I'm director - director of the association. Yeah, but you can ask me too, it's just a different role.

Yeah, I was just, interested in also finding out about this association, what's their work is?

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Some words about open3 ?

Yes, please

It was founded, I don't know, 10 years ago? eight years ago? nine years ago? something like this - as a non-profit network enabling project which showed the potential of open data, that was the actual use case.

We did some larger projects like create camps together with the Viennese Transport Authority, where we organised a two days hackathon trying to convince them that open data - providing to the traffic data as open data from the Wiener Linien [name of the Viennese Public Transporting Company] is a good idea. This was actually a success in the long run as the data got provided.

We also made projects like ubahnaufzug.at [translates to underground-elevator.at] also related to Viennese transport systems to try to show the potential of data for persons with disabilities, for example, that they know if an elevator works or not. That's an important info for planning to route through Vienna. This is now also available as open data, which is great.

We also do some - did some studies in the past with the Danube University in Krems in the Austrian parliament stressing the readiness and the consciousness for open things between the parliamentarians. Amongst several other visualizations, and apps it's actually a real network organisation coming together on a project basis and doing some cool projects which are also fun.

OK, Thank you.

Well, I'm finished with my questions, so thank you for your cooperation. Oh really? Was it that long?

No, no, no. I mean, I did these interviews also for an hour, so you never know how long people talk. But I'm through with my main questions.

Okay

So as you said, you would like to have it: I will send you the transcript once it is ready. And you can check over it.

Yeah that would be welcome.

OK, so I will stop recording now.

[Pause – where we realized that there is still something I'd like to discuss and I (consensually) started recording again]

Thank you. So what can you tell me about ckan - the open source portal you are using for data.gv.at ?

For data.gv.at we are using nearly 100 per cent open source software and the main software used is ckan, which is a metadata management system, actually the defacto

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standard for open data portals in Europe and also in the U.S. partly. It's one part of the framework and the other one is a WordPress installation for the front end, together with solar pages for providing the setted search interface.

So what does this website do, how does it work? Does it interact with other open data portals?

Yes, we are on the backend - we have several ways for submitting data for organisations. The one is a manual login - a secure login via the Portal Austria, the government access framework, where they can login and fill in a form and manage the metadata for the data sets. The other one is an excel importer where they can bulk import new metadata sets. And we're also harvesting several external portals like data.statistik.at or portal's from the counties. And these are harvested on a weekly basis. And when the meta data is updated on the source portals it's also updated on our side. And data.gv.at on the other hand, is again harvested from the European data portal so that all Austrian data sets are also available in the European data portal.

OK. Thank you

Something more?

Is there something more you can tell me about this data portal that I might not ask you as a question because I don't know about it?

We have three main areas. The one is we're providing data currently about 32.000 metadata sets on the portal, which is the core area of a portal.

Another area is the so-called application directory, which is actually just showing the output of all the open government data, where we list applications, visualizations, apps, concepts, using the data we have.

And in preparation of the upcoming freedom of Information law, we also currently now having an area called documents, where we provide open documents which are also available on the Creative Commons licence and can be shared without having to ask for any additional permissions. This are the main areas of the portal with frontend. We are also using open source statistic matomo, which is also accessible for every interested person publicly.

And we have some really interesting data sets like tenders from the public authorities, which is available since 2019, which is a really nice dataset allowing small businesses to see which tenders there are and search for them.

Some highlights.

OK, thank you.

I will also transcribe this and send to you as well as the other one. Thank you again.

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5.1.15 Date of interview: 26th of febuary 2021 - Lea Pfau

Interviewer: Andreas Czák (marked **bold**)

Interviewed Person: Lea Pfau

Hello and thank you for sharing your time to support my master's thesis. I will start right away with some organisational questions. Am I allowed to record this interview?

Yes.

Thank you. Is it OK to name you and your organisation?

Yes

OK, so what is the name of your employer? In which countries do you work? And that also includes which countries are affected by your work.

The name of the organisation is the Open Knowledge Foundation in Germany, I work for a project called fragdenstaat, which is concerned with the Freedom of Information laws. We mainly work in Germany, but we're starting to do more on an EU level as well. So we started our first campaign with EU access to information this month. So it's mainly Germany and the EU.

Can you name the general tasks of the organisation you're working for?

With organisation you mean the Open Knowledge Foundation?

The Open Knowledge Foundation, Yes.

OK, for the Open Knowledge Foundation, the kind of claim that we use is open knowledge for an open digital society, so we try to empower citizens to use digital tools in a way that benefits them, the benefits the society and kind of use digital technologies for the greater good would be the overall mission. So we have different projects that are concerned with government transparency, with civic tech groups, digital education and things like that.

Thank you. Um, going to the field of transparency: Is government and state transparency something you come in touch with your daily or monthly work? And if yes, please describe how.

Yes, we do.

So fragdenstaat as a project consists of a website where people can file Freedom of Information requests to administrations all over Germany and the EU, so we help people in filing these requests, we also do campaigns, also we help people filing freedom of information requests. We also do strategic lawsuits if some administration doesn't want to publish certain information.

We try to force them to follow freedom of information laws

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As you clearly stated, you already have worked with laws on regional and country and you level that and able to access information held by public authorities. Is that correct?

Yes.

On which level do these requests take place is it's a regional level, is it country level, the EU level, is it mixed all three of them?

It's all three of them. So the requests and kind of the research that we do on our own as the main team of fragdenstaat are mostly on a national level. But if you look at the statistic of all the requests that have been filed via fragdenstaat most of them have been on a local level or regional level.

So most people who use our website file requests on the local level and then there are some on the national level and the EU level as well.

So the regional level are all german ... uhm, are they called states?

It's mainly Kommunen [Germanys lowest administrative level is called "Kommune"], very regional towns and cities, those are the most most requested.

What are your experiences with the right to information laws?

Well, the first request that I filed was when I started working for the Open Knowledge Foundation for a different project and Arne, a project manager, came up to me one day and was like, you should file a freedom of information request and I was like sure, what is that? Tell me more.

And I really liked the idea of it.

And the realization that you really can ask for pretty much anything was a bit overwhelming at first. I didn't really know what to ask for. And then the more I got into it and also working for if fragdenstaat then.

I can realize the potential that's there and what to look for. So when I read the news or watch the news.

I always get new ideas for requests like the reading articles, like documents that – "die uns vorliegen" [that are available to us] in german – is also always very common.

So that was kind of the first positive experience, that realisation that we have this right. And then after working with it a little bit more. There were a few negative experiences with authorities not making information available and trying to use excuses so they don't have to publish things which can be a little bit frustrating.

Yeah.

What are key aspects that you believe have to be part of a right to information law?

There's a couple I hope I can remember them all.

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The right of access to information should always be free. There should be no cost associated with it.

Because it's often very.

If you know that you might have to pay for something, then you're less likely to file a request if you can't afford it. So access to information should always be free.

It should cover all public authorities, including things like companies that belong to the state, private companies that entirely belong to the state, that are under the control of the state, including the "Verfassungsschutz" [Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV)] and yeah, just all all public authorities.

It should have very limited exceptions, of course, some exceptions make sense, such as personal data and national security, but with every exception, there should be a balance. So if the information is very relevant and it's really important to make public, exceptions from the exceptions should also be possible.

What else?

There are a few more.

Take your time.

Oh, yeah, there should be an ombudsperson who can - yeah, if an authority doesn't want to give out the information, citizens should be able to go to an ombudsperson and that ombudsperson should ideally also have the right to force the authority to release the information if the ombudsperson thinks that that's the correct thing to do. So in Germany currently they can only say: "Oh, we think that you should publish it for these reasons.", but the final decision is still with the authority and not with the ombudsperson. So ideally, the ombudsperson should have that right.

Yeah, I think those are the main ones.

Which of these aspects are currently missing to you and on which legislative level?

All of them pretty much, so for the cost question, I think in all of Germany on the regional and national level the authorities can require for you to pay.

In most cases, there is a limit of what you have to pay.

In Germany on the national level, I think 500 euros is the maximum you have to pay, but still a lot

So making that free for everything on every level would be good.

And then, as I said, the ombudsperson doesn't have the right to force publication of information, it can only be suggested.

What else did I mention?

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Oh, yeah, there's a few exceptions concerning which public bodies have to give out information. So the Verfassungsschutz [Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution] or also the Bundesnachrichtendienst [The foreign intelligence service of Germany], they only have to give out environmental information. The environmental law is a bit more citizen friendly than the freedom of information law. Yeah, so most of them are missing I'd say.

Have you worked with the Austrian so-called Auskunftspflichtgesetz?

Not really. I know of it and I've looked at fragdenstaat.at website, but I haven't further investigated.

Okay, that is fine.

Uhm, sorry to go back to the last question. I asked on which legislative level those aspects are missing. Does it also include the EU level?

I'm not entirely sure of that I haven't filed too many requests myself.

I'm not sure.

OK, that's also fine, um.

Frameworks: Which frameworks for right information requests or transparency research do you use?

fragdenstaat.de - I think I may have used asktheeu at some point.

Maybe? I've looked at it for sure, I've looked at other requests, I'm not sure I filed one myself, but yeah.

Do these frameworks play a role for you when doing data research or conducting right information requests?

Oh, yes.

I mean, the nice thing about it is, that all or almost all requests that also other people file are all public on the website. So if I'm looking for something, in many cases I don't have to file a request myself, but I can look at the ones that are already there. So that makes it a lot quicker and easier.

Can you name all of the frameworks that you know?

fragdenstaat.de , fragdenstaat.at , asktheeu.org , and then there's all the ones from Alaveteli , which in the UK one is called, Whatdotheyknow ,

And all of the other ones, I don't know them by heart.

So what are the positive aspects and the negative aspects of these frameworks, which features do you like and which features are missing for you? And please, when you answer this question, name the framework you're talking about specifically.

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I'm mostly gonna be talking about fragdenstaat probably.

So as I said, I like that everything is made public and that other people can also see the requests. It has that access for one access for all approach. So if an information has been released to one person, then every everyone else should also be able to see it. I like that it has a pre formulated text that adds all the kind of legal stuff to it.

So this is a request under paragraph so-and-so. So you only have to put in the actual information that you want and not really be concerned with all of the bureaucratic stuff. And it also has options and reminds you if if the time limit for the authority to reply to you has exceeded and gives you a reminder for an option to remind the authority: "Hey please answer my requests". So it makes it very easy to use.

Some of the aspects that I don't like, which is also what we're kind of working on because, of course, in the double role, I use the platform but also work for it.

So some things that we want to do to make it more accessible for even more people, things like do screen readers, work with everything.

Can we, like if it's a badly scanned PDF, can we OCR it so that people can read it more easily and have more explanations of what the law actually is, also maybe in different languages? The limit for accessibility is, of course, that everything has to be in German, the communication with your authorities, because they're only gonna answer in German.

Yeah, also making all the information and the requests that are there more easily searchable. I think our search function could need some improvement.

And kind of like anything that does that enables you to also do a bit more of a meta analysis, maybe so comparing which institutions reply the quickest, what kind of exceptions are used and things like that.

Thank you. Um, could you decide for one specific frameworks that should be a standard framework for you on a country level? And if yes, which one?

Fragdenstaat - clearly.

Thank you.

Do you know the website www.rti-rating.org ?

A little bit, not too well, but.

I've looked at it before, I guess.

Could you read your overall impression of the information of the information provided there? And please feel free to name positive and negative aspects of this website and information provided.

Am I allowed to look at the website right now to remind myself.

Yes.

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OK, um.

I like that it's easy to compare. I would have to look into the methodology in more detail, but I assume there's a German version of this website for the German states, which I assume is a very similar way. Yeah, since here there's 61 indicators, so I assume they're probably setting up the indicators of what should be the maximum transparency and then look for each law, whether they fulfil that criteria.

I'm going to have a look at Germany. Yeah.

OK, I like that they include that specific article of where they got the information for the scoring. But also, it seems targeted towards people who already are familiar with freedom of information laws. So there's not a lot of extra explaining or further information about what these laws are.

I guess it's more targeted towards people are already familiar with it, which is fine.

Okay. Yeah, thank you. End remarks to the overall topic of transparency, state transparency: Do you have any additional remarks that you would like to make?

I think freedom of information is a very underused right.

I think in countries like the U.S., it's a lot more common for journalists to use it and a lot more well known. And my hope and my mission, I guess, at work is to to tell more people about it, to empower more people to use it, because it's really useful in any kind of journalism, but also activism that you do anything related to politics.

So whether you're in environmental politics or in traffic or whatever, there is always useful information, and I think it's a great way to empower citizens and yeah, people should do that - use it.

OK, thank you very much for your cooperation. If you would like to have it, I will send you the transcript once it's ready.

Yeah sure.

OK.

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