



ROUTE-TO-PA GUIDE

A way to the next-generation

Transparent Open Data Initiatives

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ROUTE-TO-PA: RAISING OPEN AND USER-FRIENDLY TRANSPARENCY-ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

ROUTE-TO-PA is a multidisciplinary innovation project, that, by combining expertise and research in the fields of e-government, computer science, learning science and economy, has been aiming at improving the impact, towards citizens and within society, of ICT-based technology platforms for transparency. ROUTE-TO-PA envisioned that Information and Communication Technologies for Transparency must improve the engagement of citizens by making them able to socially interact over open data, by forming or joining existing online communities that share common interest and discuss common issues of relevance to local policy, service delivery, and regulation.

VISION & MISSION

ROUTE-TO-PA aims at engaging citizens to a higher degree by providing a robust and more holistic understanding of transparency, by underpinning the next generation open-data based transparency initiatives, ensuring that published data are those of value to citizens, with a personalized view in different forms to different segments of the citizens and public based on their profiles for facilitate better understanding.

ROUTE-TO-PA delivered the experimented innovative and engaging ICT platforms to ensure citizen-friendly, conscious, and effective access to open-data, by offering easy understanding of, and social collaboration on, open data offered by PAs.

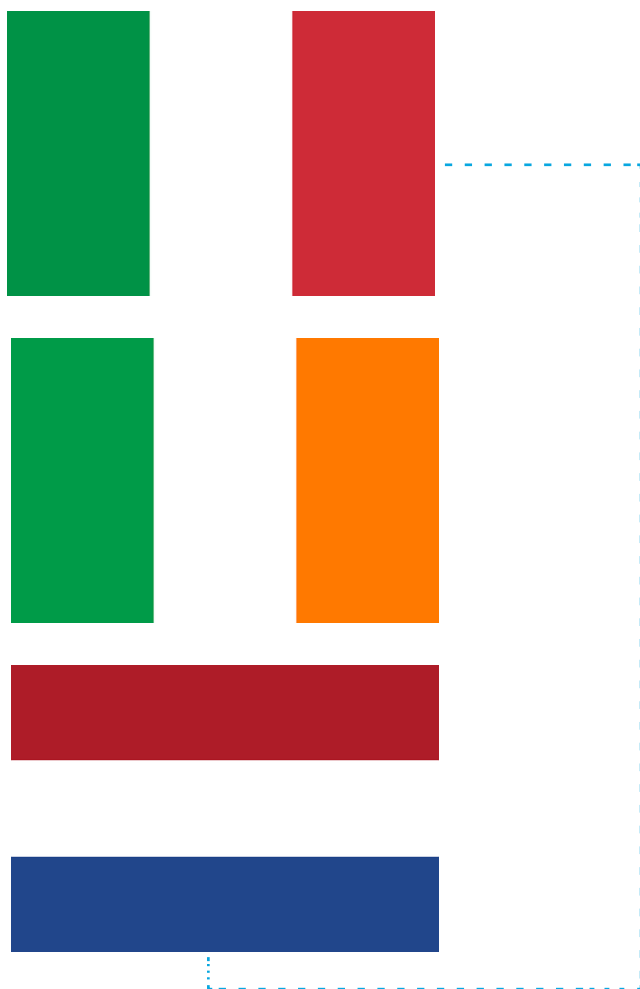


The main objectives of Route-To-PA were set as follows:

Develop a **Social Platform for Open Data (SPOD)** enabling social interactions among open data users and between open data users and government data enabling effective data exploration, editing and co-creation

Build **Transparency-Enhancing Toolset (TET)** as extensions for existing major Open Data Platforms to support citizens in better understanding, exploration and investigation of Open Data.

Develop a set of recommendations (GUIDE) as good practice guide for open data publishers for achieving higher quality transparency through open data



ROUTE-TO-PA AND TRANSPARENCY

In ROUTE-TO-PA we address the issue of transparency, i.e., opening up public data and services and facilitating citizen participation and engagement, with the result of making government processes and decision open.

We investigate possibilities of improved transparency by evaluating the use of the ROUTE-TO-PA transparency enabling tools (SPOD & TET) in real world scenarios using the developed evaluation tool.

ROUTE-TO-PA consortium has been explicitly brought together for effective transparency innovation. In particular we involved pilot PAs coming from three different countries: Italy, Ireland and The Netherlands

1- Pilots - Public Administration

The Town Council of Prato, Italy, the Town Council of Dublin, Ireland, Town Council of The Hague, The Town Council of Groningen and The Town Council of Utrecht in The Netherlands

2- Innovation Partners

Università degli Studi di Salerno, the National University of Ireland, Galway, the Utrecht University and the Warsaw School of Economics

3- The Social Science Partners

The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and Wise & Munro

4- External Stakeholders

Ancitel, Ortelio and the Open Knowledge Foundation (Open Knowledge International)

OUR RESULTS

ROUTE-TO-PA project attempts to answer the question:

How PAs can progress from nominal to effective transparency through improved Open Data experience?

Our final results corroborate the findings in the literature that **data improves with use and its use increases transparency**. The benefits of Open Data have been demonstrated on a broad level, and it cannot be ignored when governments are looking for ways to increase transparency and participation as part of the Open Government democratic discourse.



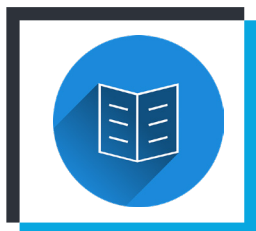
A major outcome of our investigation is that it is a continuous PAs' and citizens' activity that drives transparency

MAJOR OBSERVATION

In order to make data useful for transparency purposes within the public administrations, we do suggest an approach towards effective transparency via strong user and/or community engagement on Open Data platforms, equipped with TET and SPOD extensions or tools offering similar capabilities. Individual users transform Open Data into knowledge more effectively through, automated data insights presentation, social interaction, collaborative exploration and data co-creation supported by the proposed advanced Open Data platform paradigm. We argue that the produced knowledge (enriched context), which can be reflected in further citizen public discussions, public feedback, journalistic articles and useful citizen-applications, encourages PAs to open more data since the added value becomes very evident and tangible.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT FACILITATORS AND NEW ADOPTERS OF THE ROUTE-TO-PA TOOLS

Growing the ROUTE-TO-PA community or in fact any community calls for patience and the will to iterate prior strategies as it might, more often than not, mean going back to the drawing board. Community building is not only a joint effort between partners in the consortium but also a continuous and intensive process with other stakeholders on the open platforms and online channels. We list the recommendations and suggestions that project facilitators and new adopters, are most likely to be needing during a community building project that involves Open Data.



Activities

If the facilitators intend to facilitate a community project that includes open data for fact finding and data-driven storytelling, they need to make sure that the project plan offers a sound balance between online and offline activities



Community

Take part in existing community events by sponsoring them, or signing up to speak about public administration efforts,



Workshops & Events

Run themed workshops regularly around different topics i.e. a diversity event on International Women's Day, a workshop on water sources and afforestation efforts in the municipality on World Environment Day, etc to increase use of data published by the public administrations, and solidify relationship with the community. As well as running data literacy sessions for those who are interested in becoming active members working with ROUTE-TO-PA tools.



Resources

A community help desk will guarantee the ongoing monitoring of SPOD at all times and would encourage continued engagement as well as guaranteeing that TET is constantly updated with useful and usable data. This help desk can manifest both online and offline.

KEY TAKE AWAY

Planning the scenarios and community building & general project planning suggestions

Themes that seem to cause less political controversy for public administrations and/or the current local government, are more likely to be backed by the public administration; as it showed in the case of Den Haag co-creation PA & employers pilot, themes that might comprise specific business interests might not necessarily lead to a success.

Cultural themes have proven to be particularly successful in the locations where the cultural heritage is strongly cherished; as in the case of our Italian pilots.

Regular online meetings (between the PAs and citizens) must be supported by offline meetings to ensure smooth dialog and citizen-engagement

Projects, even when planned, can take unexpected turns.



Test the tools very well before releasing for the public use (browser & app)



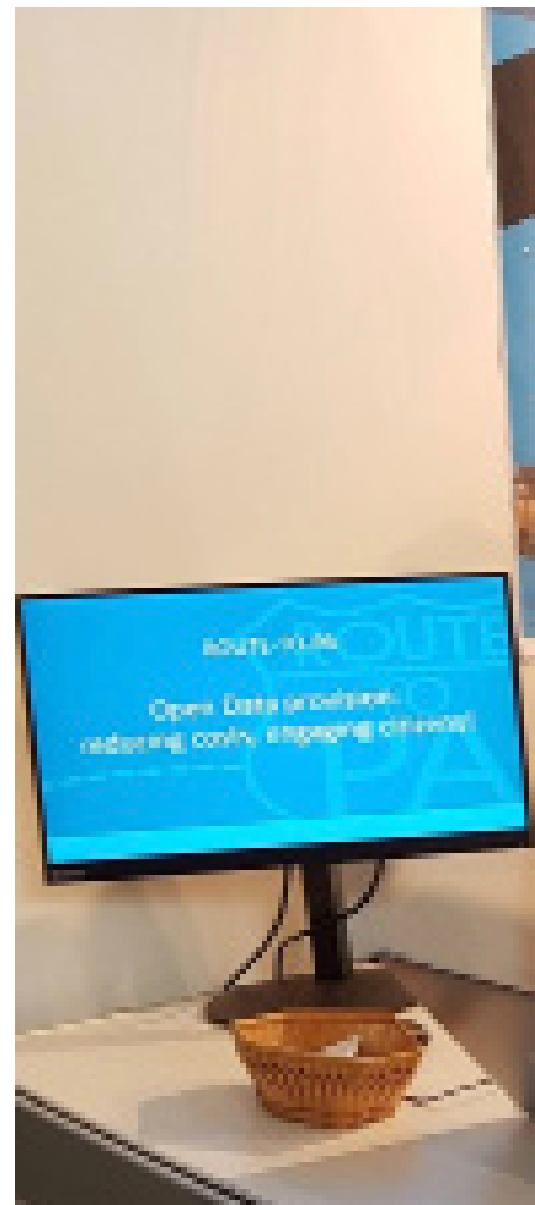
Take into consideration the location of the proposed activities and proximity from users / participants.



Be aware that Open Data projects require continues support in form of contact points for the public and/or participants, content dissemination and planning and monitor-

Plan for data literacy workshops and/or events in ahead of data expedition scenarios.

Engage local groups and local open data activists with events and activities, which will further strengthen the community building efforts.



The use of storytelling approach will help in spreading information about a certain activity.

On a critical note, if Public Administrations would like to organise and Open Data project or participate, they need to have an understanding of the concept and principles of co-creation (as applied in ROUTE-TO-PA project). During the cause of the project it become clear that for many PAs it is not quite clear what they role should be in this context. Many PAs might consider their job done once the data is published. In order to keep Open Data as a discipline alive, PAs have to come

On the technical level

Tools for co-creation and sharing need to be maintained and updated on a regular basis and provided with strong and fast technical support. Outdated or “buggy” tools or slow system-response times will drive users away immediately and usually, they are not coming back. That is especially true for tools that are new on the market.

Tools need to be developed for very intuitive and easy usage. It is important to really invest time in implementing best practice into user interface design and user experiences. Also, users don’t want to work with tools that are designed in an old-fashioned or unusual way, user the interfaces of the tools are implicitly expected to apply the same principles and mechanisms like the most used commercial platforms (e.g. Facebook, Google etc.). New interfaces introduce steep learning curve and mental effort that users will avoid by abandoning the platform.

The added value of data publishing tools that emphasise sharing and collaboration needs to be very clear, if it should convince the users to engage with the platform over a longer period of time.



PAs Role

On a critical note, if Public Administrations would like to organise and Open Data project or participate, they need to have an understanding of the concept and principles of co-creation (as applied in ROUTE-TO-PA project). During the course of the project it became clear that for many PAs it is not quite clear what their role should be in this context. Many PAs might consider their job done once the data is published. In order to keep Open Data as a discipline alive, PAs have to come up with strategies and activities that are pointing to the post-publication phase.

Risk Management

Not only investigate the opportunities what the project can do but also tap into the risks that we have listed that are certain showstoppers in different categories. Risk management is something very important that is often being neglected when planning a community project.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

THAT MIGHT HINDER SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY BUILDING

We list the roadblocks, detours and one-way streets that Open Data project facilitators are most likely to be facing during a community building

Restricted availability of Data

Lack of or irregular response to data & FOIA requests and general questions by the public administrations.

Interested citizen or members of the community who are seeking information need to know:

- If the data in question can be published openly or under what Terms and conditions? (Questions around open licences)
- with whom to follow up with after a data request is submitted?
- In case the data can't be made available, can someone explain why?

Currentness of Data

Outdated or irregularly updated data

Public administration should establish a data publishing workflow that allows for a standardized and automatized publishing of the data

Data Quality

Data that isn't published in any of the recommended Open Data formats and is therefore difficult to re-use

For the efficient re-use of the data, data users such as programmers rely on the release of data that comes in Sir Tim Berners-Lee 5-Star-Model. Open Data plan gives data publishers an orientation. The more stars a data format has been assigned the more options data users have to work with the data (i.e. using the data for data analysis or building tool based on it)

Lack of Metadata

Problems with TET's datasets

Data without metadata doesn't produce meaning. Therefore, data publisher have to not only publish data in a excellent quality on regular basis, but also need to ensure that the metadata of the data is being provided.



Internal challenge

Public administrations

- Difficulties in including other departments in the PA in the publishing of open data sets to support pilots
- project facilitators experience time consuming communication with the public administrations and a low return of investment.
- Pause of projects due to colliding political interests

Technical problems

Bugs and downtime with the ROUTE-TO-PA tools which might lead to less users coming back to the platform or suggesting it to otherscation with the public administrations and a low return of investment.



Lack of resources

Lack of resources to sufficiently facilitate a mid- to long-term community building process

In order to produce satisfying and added-value outcomes for the community, project facilitators need to take into consideration that enough resources are available to plan, implement and guide the project.

Lack of data literacy skills

Lack of data literacy skills with PAs and project stakeholders

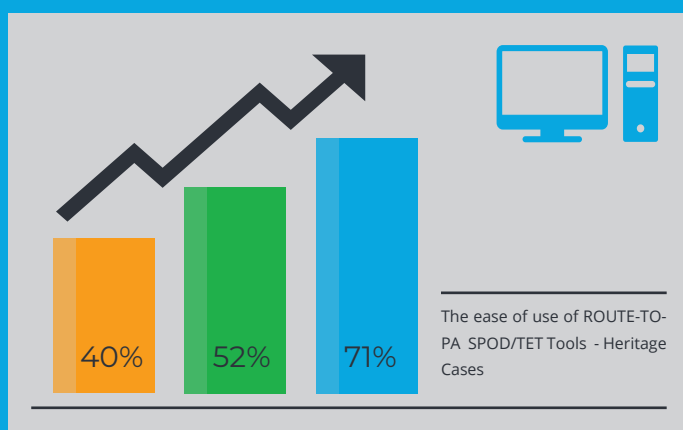
Not all PA members have the same data literacy levels.

Lack of participants

The number of active user varies from one pilot to the other and the current interest is only limited to specific scenarios, the users are not initiating conversation around data.

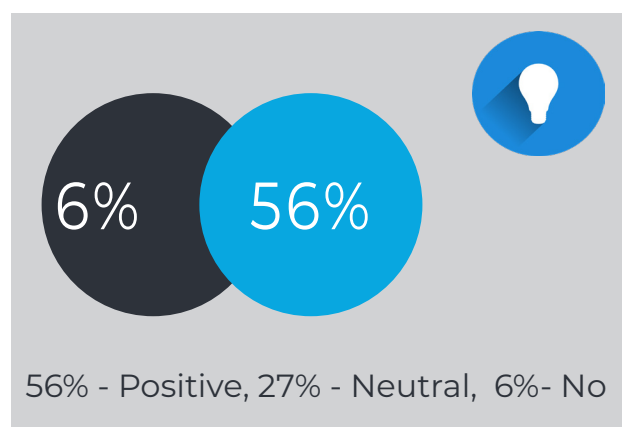
THE STATISTICS

When we asked our users the question: Did 'SPOD/TET community help you to achieve shared meaning in your group concerning the issue (e.g. population decline, employment, transport, Wifi-positions, budget, cultural heritage, etc.)', participants gave in the majority of cases a positive answer.

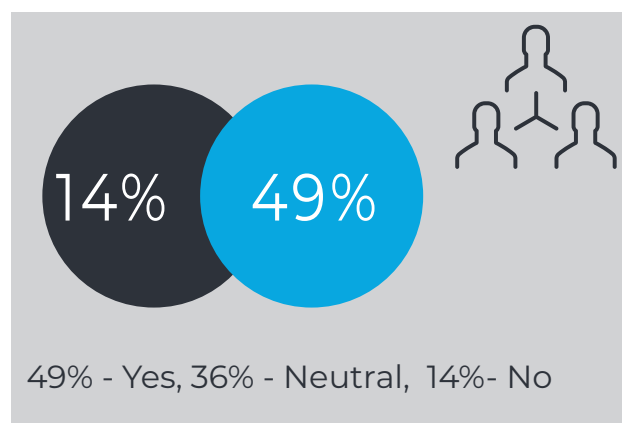


TECHNOLOGY USEFULNESS

40,3% of all users indicated that SPOD/TET tools are easy to use. The figures were higher for pilots dealing with heritage data: 52.3% of and 71% for our Italian pilots. Users pointed out the good usability of the platform, particularly concerning the insertion of data in the co-creation scenario, the creation of data visualisations and the insertion of data from different providers.



Almost half (49,3%) of the users strongly agreed that, as a result of participating in RTPA, they understood their PAs or city better and 13,8% (strongly) disagreed



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ROUTE-TO-PA COMMUNITY

We would like to give special thanks to all the stakeholders and participants who made that research possible. We encourage the designers of the next Open Data initiatives and interested parties to contact us, should they require any further information.

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