Privacy and Transparency.

The UK Government’s Transparency Programme and its Implications for Privacy

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A Disclaimer
The Transparency Agenda

• Citizens’ access to information
  – To facilitate understanding of decision-making
  – To hold governments to account
  – To reduce opportunities for corruption

• Dates from ICT and WWW revolutions, late 1990s

• Examples from 1990s
  – Andhra Pradesh (e-government: cf. Naidu, *Plain Speaking*)
  – South Africa (procurement)
  – Mexico (electoral reform)
  – Lithuania (neutral civil service)
From Medicine to Opportunity

• The agenda moves on (2010)
  – No longer a corrective for poorly functioning systems
  – Now an opportunity to improve government
  – From emerging nations to the rich democracies

• The technology is in place
  – World Wide Web (Web of Linked Documents)
  – Web of Linked Data
  – Massive number-crunching power
  – Democratisation of analysis: mashups/grids
  – Ideology of serendipitous reuse
Initial Push Under Gordon Brown

- 2006-8: AKTive PSI (University of Southampton, OPSI, & various stakeholders including Camden & Lewisham councils)
- Summer 2009: Gordon Brown supports creation of data.gov.uk
- September 2009: Beta version goes online
- December 2009: *Putting the Frontline First*
  - “A more informed citizen is a more empowered citizen”
- January 2010: Website launched
- April 2010: Release of OS data
Post-Bureaucratic Age/Big Society

• The theme also appealed to Coalition

• Empowering communities
  – Burke’s ‘little platoons’ go online
  – Entrepreneurial use of information

• Increasing accountability

• Increasing value for money
  – Radicalisation by devolving power
  – Handy in the current economic climate
Aims and Ambitions

• Make government more accountable and approachable
• Create better value for money
• Stimulate growth
• Reform public services
  – Providing choice
  – Opening up public sector contracts
• Ambition: to make the UK the most transparent and accountable government in the world
The Prime Minister’s Commitments (29th May)

• COINS spending data online in June 2010

• New central government ICT contracts online in July, all contracts by Jan 2011

• New items of gov’t spending over £25,000 online from Nov 2010
  – Local gov’t spending over £500 online from Jan 2011

• Crime data at ‘street level’ from Jan 2011

• Top civil servants’ jobs and pay rates in Jun/Sept 2010

• All done or on course
Public Sector Transparency Board (Jun 2010)

- Francis Maude (chair)
  - Sir Tim Berners-Lee
  - Rufus Pollock
  - Nigel Shadbolt
  - Tom Steinberg

- Support and challenge public bodies in their implementation of the transparency agenda
- Extend the agenda to local gov’t and public services
- Establish public data principles
Public Data Principles (Draft)

- Reusable, machine-readable
- Free reuse, including commercial reuse
- Available through single access point (data.gov.uk)
- Open W3C standards
- Timely and fine-grained
- Quick release
- Encourage reuse, publish inventories
Work in Progress

- Increases in depth of coverage and breadth of scope
- Promotion of culture change
  - Government
  - Public
- Evaluation
- Change presumptions of access
  - “Why not?”
Examples: ASBOrometer

- iPhone app giving stats about anti-social behaviour
- #1 free app in iTunes app store
Examples: Govspark

- Measures gov’t departments’ carbon footprints
- Created by Isabell Long, age 16
Examples: CycleStreets

- Helps plan a cycle journey
Examples: Where Does My Money Go?

- Visualises information about public spending
Transparency

- Yet there is an apparent contradiction
Transparency v Privacy

• If the gov’t is transparent then it must release data
• What about data relating to me?
• If the data is released on the WWW, then where is my privacy?
• What is privacy here?
  – Data is held by gov’t
  – No individual control
  – Trust in gov’t to prevent access
• From practical obscurity to anonymity
From This ...
To This ...
Personal Data (1998 Data Protection Act) Not Included

1. Can a living individual be identified from the data?
2. Does the data relate to the individual? (*)
3. Is it obviously about that individual? (*)
4. Is it linked to that individual? (*)
5. Is it to be used to inform actions affecting that individual? (*)
6. Does it have biographical significance in relation to that individual? (*)
7. Does it focus on the individual as its central theme? (*)
8. Does it have the potential to impact on that individual? (*)
Issues: Triangulation

• Cf. Mosaic (Experian)
Issues: Information Without Identification
Issues: Consent

• Is this something we have tacitly agreed to?
  – Did we consent to practical obscurity?

• How far can one balance the public good against private preference?

• Is it feasible to allow withdrawal?
  – Cost
    – Crippling transparency programme

• Evaluation
  – Quality
  – Coverage
Summary

• Transparency
  – A good
  – An opportunity

• Privacy
  – Too much or too little could equally wreck the programme

• What are the limits of legitimacy?

• What weapons are there?
  – Redaction
  – Aggregation
  – Consent
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