

OPEN LEGISLATION: COMPARISON OF LEGAL PORTALS IN THREE COUNTRIES

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The digital transformation has affected people's lives, businesses, and the public sector. Large amounts of information and data from various sources have become available to the public (Jetzek et al., 2012). Nowadays, data plays a significant role in people's lives. Data has become the most critical driver of the digital age. Moreover, the public sector produces an enormous amount of data and information that are an extremely valuable resource and fuel that offers society an opportunity to drive tremendous economic and social change (Charalabidis et al., 2018). In spite of that, the opening of data by public organizations and public bodies has happened lately. Over the past few years, many governments have become driven and influenced by open data policies and have instructed their public organizations and public bodies to enable the release of public sector information and data (van Loenen et al., 2018). That has immensely increased the amount of open data freely available to the public. Although public organizations have made available their data, the potential of open data (data that anyone can access, share, use, and re-use without any restrictions or barriers) to become an essential tool for growth, innovation, and data-driven products and services can only be utilized when shared and re-used without restrictions or charge for their (re)use (Welle Donker and van Loenen, 2017).

Presently, vast collections of open data that hold enormous potential in various fields such as health, traffic etc. have been made available to the public without limitations for use and re-use (van Loenen et al., 2018). However, this research focuses on legal information and data and legislative portals as a specific type of open data portals that publish and make available legal information and data without restriction for their use and re-use. Legal information and data are specific types of open data that explain a law, legal system, and legal process and can be found in different legal documents such as acts, bills, case laws, administrative decisions, regulations, and similar (Musa, 2017). Policy-makers, legal experts and advisors, legal professionals, and legal scholars are constantly interested in legal data - one of the most crucial factors underpinning decision-making for various areas (Musa, 2017). In general, legal data is one of the essential sources of open data. Further, the availability of legal information and data is fundamental for legal certainty and legal and natural persons' conduct (Musa, 2017). The general public must be notified about laws and regulatory measures if they are affected by them, and legal documents with rules must be made publicly available to enable citizens and businesses to comply with them. Several thousands of legal acts and specific regulations are enacted by a national government and local authorities

every year. Also, on a daily basis, courts are issuing court rulings and decisions, and administrative bodies are making administrative decisions. Due to the digital age and fast-paced environment, the number of documents with legal data and information published online is growing exponentially (Musa, 2019). Thus, legislative portals as a specific type of open data portal are very important since they make legal information and data available to data users - legal professionals, lawyers, judges, legal researchers, legal scholars, and others. For legal professionals and other legal data users, it is essential to have the opportunity and convenience to easily and quickly find specific legal data and relevant legal documents that are fundamental for preparing a legal case, issuing the right decision, or just remaining informed about a specific legal topic. Also, law teaching and law student research resources have changed over the past 20 years and it is expected that many standard legal resources (legislation, case law, and other legal documents) are now available online.

Legal data holds enormous potential and promise, and legislative portals' functions and objectives should be the promotion and support of free access to legal data and information. Therefore, the goal of the research is to evaluate open data portals, governance, and availability of open data from the perspective of the legislative portal. All conducted research in the open data field acknowledges the relevance of appropriate governance structures, policies, and legal frameworks. Also, availability is one of the main requirements that need to be fulfilled to qualify data as open data. For that reason, the research tries to look into and determine the main features of governance of legislative portals in terms of key policy aspects, organization, and legal frameworks, and to what extent open data is available on the legislative portals. However, despite the significance of legal data as a specific type of open data, only a couple of scholars have paid attention to open legal data and legislative portals publishing these data. At the moment, no specific assessment instrument applicable to the open data legislative portals exists. In order to fulfill this goal, an assessment tool applicable to open data legislative portals based on the existing open data assessment theory and tools is created. The developed assessment tool has been applied to the legislative portals in specific countries chosen as a case study. The results of using the assessment tool show which similarities and differences between evaluated legislative portals exist.

Preliminary findings after applying the proposed assessment tool on selected legislative portals reveal that the effective development of legislative portals requires proper governance to organize and coordinate activities and contributions of different stakeholders. Also, findings prompt that legal data as a specific type of open data is considered available only if the data is a whole, downloadable from the Internet, with no costs, and can be freely (re)used or, in other words, if the data is made available in a format acceptable for further re-use following the open data standard. The initial analyses point out clearly that all assessed legislative portals aggregate collected legislative information from official sources and that the collected information is then standardized, cleaned, and published to the public. In addition, the analysis indicates that selected portals are very diverse in terms of performance and functionalities - each legislative portal has its own specific strengths and weakness. Besides, it is determined that companies that provide private legislative portals invest heavily in adding editorial content and developing sophisticated software for their search engines and interfaces. Thus, legislative platforms owned by private companies are unlikely to share the breadth of data necessary for robust scientific inquiry and public oversight. This research also identifies issues that prevent the effective re-use of legal data. Preliminary findings indicate that legislative portals should offer legal professionals and other legal data users a better quality of data

and make it easier for users to find reusable legal data and information. Also, access to legal data should be provided free of charge.

Consequently, this research states a set of related recommendations on how to overcome these issues related to the re-use of open data. Preliminary findings indicate that legislative portals should aim to serve legal professionals and other legal data users with better quality of data and the portal should strive to provide users with legal data in near-real time. Legislative portals should work as a catalyst triggering the publication of more and better quality legal data. Thus, in order that legal data can be re-used, more work needs to be done to offer all data in a machine-readable format. Because of the unique nature of legal content, special consideration must be given to the search engine, site navigation, and explanatory help. In addition, the availability of open data (especially technical openness and metadata completeness) should be improved and legislative portals should be established as web-based interfaces designed to make it easier to find reusable legal data and information. Further, legislative portals should support teaching and learning in legal education by creating and offering a database of important legal decisions freely and openly available to any interested legal data user. Consequently, the legislative portal's commitment to open access principles should provide that legal professionals, the business community, and the general public are able to access the most important legal documents, data, and materials free of charge.

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