



Russia: from *Glasnost*¹ to Open Government, progress on the transparency front

Despite its apparent lack of openness, Russia is fully committed to the Open Data revolution². According to Ivan Begtin, director of NGO Infoculture, “a significant and powerful widespread movement towards open data is underway”. The Open Data Barometer ranks Russia 26th out of 86 countries, ahead of Belgium, Portugal and Ireland. In addition, the first national Open Data conference was held in Moscow on 10-11 December 2015³.

Aware of the advantages of Open Government, Russia jumped on the bandwagon in 2011

The concept of Open Government first emerged in Russia in 2002 with the launch of the federal government’s “Electronic Russia” programme⁴. The adoption in 2009 of a federal law governing access to data produced by national and local government agencies was the starting point for Russia’s Open Government⁵ policy. The decision was a bold one, but Russia’s administration quickly realised the huge advantages offered by promoting greater transparency.

As well as making historical data available⁶, the Open Government policy helps to boost citizens’ participation rate. In addition, the European Commission has estimated that the country’s open data policy could add an extra \$48.7 billion to GDP⁷. Furthermore, implementing easy-to-interpret rules and providing access to data improves the country’s image, which in turn helps attract investors and new capital flows⁸.

From Big Government⁹ to Open Government: Russia’s long and winding road to transparency

To remain in step with the global trend, President Medvedev launched the Big Government¹¹ initiative in October 2011. In February 2012, a task force was set up to look at how to implement an Open Government policy¹², and in May of the same year, Mikhail Abyzov^{10&11} was appointed Minister of Open Government. The initiative’s key principles were citizen involvement, stakeholder accountability, access to data and government transparency¹². At this point, the use of open government data became a priority for federal agencies, with the publication in May 2012 of a decree covering the main areas of improvement for the e-Government system.⁸

2013 was a pivotal yet contradictory year. Open data projects abound. In February, the city of Moscow launched its open data platform (data.mos.ru), an online map of the city, and the Open Government Expert Council saw the light of day¹¹. In April, the Ulyanovsk Oblast (regional government) launched Russia’s first open data initiative with the World Bank’s

¹ *Glasnost* is a Russian term denoting openness and transparency that was popularised by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986. It symbolises the political movement that came to the fore in Russia following the Chernobyl disaster. Its goal was to promote greater freedom of expression and publish information more freely.

² Principle that advocates that public data (i.e. data collated, updated and used by government agencies) should be made freely available to citizens and businesses.

³ <http://infometer.org/blogi/summit-od-2015>

⁴ 28 January 2002

⁵ <https://www.hse.ru/pubs/share/direct/document/152192787>

⁶ <http://blog.okfn.org/2015/01/16/budgetapps-the-first-all-russia-contest-on-open-finance-data/>

⁷ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2012/11/12/open-government-a-la-russe-how-the-russian-government-is-trying-to-modernize/>

⁸ <http://www.davidpublisher.org/Public/uploads/Contribute/55598ca55490e.pdf>

⁹ *Большое правительство*

¹⁰ <http://government.ru/en/gov/persons/201/events/>

¹¹ <http://www.newmediacenter.ru/2013/07/16/evolution-of-electronic-government-in-russia/>

support¹². In total, 27 projects were launched by Russia's federal or local governments¹². In contrast, May saw Russia withdraw from the Open Government Partnership¹³ it had joined in December 2012 as it wanted to pursue Open Government¹⁴ on its own terms.

The various programmes being launched are proof of the government's commitment to Open Data

Spurred on by non-government organisations that actively promote open data, such as Infoculture and the Open City Foundation¹⁵, Russia has made up lost ground very quickly¹⁶. The open.gov.ru website created in 2011 provides an overview of all past and current open data initiatives. Online since March 2014, the data.gov.ru website contains many open data sources and serves as a communication platform¹⁷. In December 2015, over 6,000 datasets were available on this website (compared to 1,040 when it first came online) in addition to approximately 5,000 datasets available on regional websites¹⁸.

Several open data websites that encourage citizens to express their views have been created by the government^{8&19}. All draft bills are published on the regulation.gov.ru (28,355) website. They are open to discussion before they are put to the vote, and in theory can be assessed and even blocked if there are suspicions of corruption²⁰. The clearspending.ru website keeps track of government expenditure and is used to manage more than 12 million contracts, 270,000 sub-contractors and 900,000 suppliers²¹. Significant training efforts have also been made to ensure that all stakeholders have up-to-date skills²⁰. An open data school (opendataschool.ru) has also been created.

The Russian government has launched several initiatives aimed at promoting its open government policy. In December 2014, the Finance Minister joined forces with Infoculture to run a competition to develop the BudgetApps application using open finance data²². In October 2015, the government's strategic analysis centre organised its second hackathon in Moscow which attracted 32 teams of developers. Over the course of this two-day event, the teams worked on building test applications using open budget data made available by the government²³. One of the government's key priorities is to produce a citizens' budget²⁴. The aim of this national competition, which rewards the most innovative ideas, is to make it easier for Russia's citizens to understand the budget²⁵.

Russia's open data potential and key challenges faced

The ideal conditions are not in place to develop an optimal open data policy²⁶. For example, much of the data refers to internal operations and contains information that is of no real public interest⁸; particularly regarding the budget¹⁹. Russia nevertheless has significant potential to develop its open data policy further²⁵. To do so, it must deal with several challenges:

- Data must be easier to interpret and made more accessible. A significant amount of work is required to improve the quality of the data produced (definition of criteria), promote its use⁶ and ensure it is comparable between regions.
- The data made available must be used to promote innovation and boost economic growth²⁷.
- Citizens must be involved in the government's open data policy in order to take part in assessing it²⁸. Genuine interaction between Russia's citizens and government agencies should be made possible³ to encourage their involvement²⁰ and innovation¹⁹.

The creation of an open data centre of excellence would be the first step in extending the Open Government²⁰ policy.

¹² <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/04/10/ulyanovsk-oblast-regional-government-launches-open-data-initiative-in-russia>

¹³ <http://www.newmediacenter.ru/2013/07/16/evolution-of-electronic-government-in-russia/>

¹⁴ <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

¹⁵ <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/blog/alex-howard/2013/05/20/russia-withdraws-open-government-partnership-too-much-transparency>

¹⁶ <http://fr.slideshare.net/fullscreen/inxaoc/open-data-in-russia-open-budget-open-transport-ect-for-wego-webinar/2>

¹⁷ <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/russia/Open-Data-and-Economic-Growth-in-Russia-ENG.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.epsiplatform.eu/content/russia-launches-its-open-data-portal>

¹⁹ St Petersburg: <http://data.gov.spb.ru/> - Toula: <http://www.opendata71.ru/> - région de Perm <http://opendata.permkrai.ru/opendata/>,

Moscow city budget (budget.mos.ru) – Saint Petersburg budget (budget.lenobl.ru) – Russia's parliament (duma.gov.ru) and federal government ministries, including the Ministry of the Interior (mvd.ru/opendata) – the government's procurement website (zakupki.gov.ru) – the website for auditing municipal and national government services (vashkontrol.ru)

²⁰ <http://www.rg.ru/2014/07/24/portal-site.html>

²¹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/01/13/unleashing-the-potential-of-open-data>

²² <http://blog.okfn.org/2015/01/16/budgetapps-the-first-all-russia-contest-on-open-finance-data/>

²³ <http://open.gov.ru/events/5513999/>

²⁴ <http://budget.open.gov.ru/>

²⁵ <http://open.gov.ru/events/5514768/>

²⁶ <http://habrahabr.ru/company/infoculture/blog/272965/>

²⁷ <http://ac.gov.ru/en/events/04344.html>

²⁸ <http://www.iis.ru/en/content/view/575/91/>

